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“SPEAKING WITH” THE RAVINE: REPRESENTATION AND MEMORY IN FIVE
CULTURAL PRODUCTIONS OF CHAVEZ RAVINE, LOS ANGELES

by

Karl Germeck

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

American Studies

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2011

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ABSTRACT

“Speaking With” the Ravine: Representation and Memory in Five
Cultural Productions of Chavez Ravine, Los Angeles

by

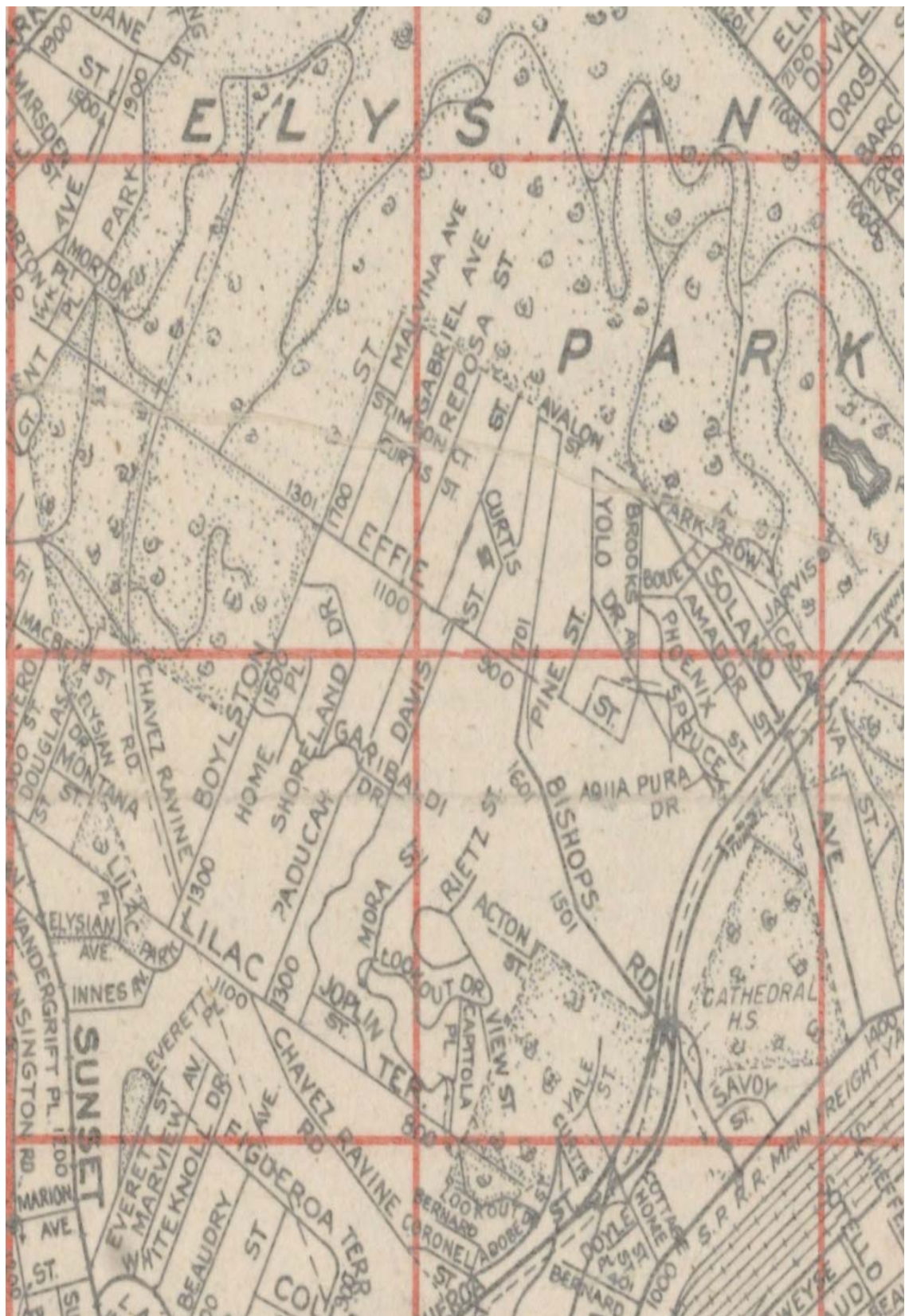
Karl Germeck, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2011

Major Professor: Melody Graulich
Program: American Studies

This thesis examines the rich and layered intertextual relationship between five artistic representations of the razed neighborhoods of Chavez Ravine, Los Angeles, and its former residents. These works include Seattle-based photographer Don Normark’s 1999 photography collection *Chávez Ravine, 1949: A Los Angeles Story*; the full-length dramatic play *Chavez Ravine*, written and first performed by Los Angeles-based Chicano comedy troupe Culture Clash in 2003; Jordan Mechner’s 2004 short documentary film *Chávez Ravine: A Los Angeles Story*; Ry Cooder’s musical album *Chávez Ravine: A Record by Ry Cooder*; and lastly, high school history teacher Ken Aven’s 2006 debut novel, *Chavez Ravine Echoes*. Together, these five productions make up a case study that engages with the theoretical debate about privileged groups speaking for, or on behalf of, underrepresented groups. This analysis emphasizes a process of representation that is shared and driven by dialogue between the artists of these productions and the place and people they represent. Through the inclusion of resident involvement in the production process and the weaving of narrative elements from both Mexican American and dominant cultural traditions, these projects promote the Ravine’s cultural wealth and visibility within a popular culture dominated by the symbol of Dodger Stadium. This study, through close

readings and textual analysis, demonstrates how these works, considered together, open up spaces for cross-cultural discussions about Chavez Ravine and the various roles it plays within U.S. cultural history. More importantly, these five representations of Chavez Ravine figuratively practice and promote a “speaking to and with” model of intercultural communication between dominant and minority cultures.



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INTRODUCTION

“SPEAKING WITH” CHAVEZ RAVINE

The research for this study began in the fall of 2005 after I purchased and listened to Los Angeles native Ry Cooder’s then-new album, *Chávez Ravine: A Record by Ry Cooder*. I was familiar with Cooder and his music at the time, but I knew nothing of the long since demolished neighborhoods of Chavez Ravine, L.A. and its displaced residents, or the fact that Dodger Stadium (since 1962) rests on top of where this community once was. I bought the disc on a whim, if no more than for its visually striking cover art and the themes it provokes. For example, the album cover’s lurid red background, paired with the lone stick figure in the lower left-hand corner, with its arms stretched out toward the spacecraft hovering above, suggests a theme of alien encounters. On the other hand, the valley of neighborhood homes sprawled out along the cover’s foreground and encroached upon by the enormous skeleton-driven bulldozer pertains more to issues of urban re-development. The combination of these two stories within one scene seemed unfamiliar and puzzling to me. “How do alien encounters and urban development relate,” I wondered, “and what is their relationship to ‘Chavez Ravine’?” More importantly, as my research developed, Cooder’s relationship to Chavez Ravine—how he represents the Ravine, why, and to what end—emerged as a major underlying current.



Fig. 1. Michael C. McMillen, illus. Front Cover, *Chávez Ravine: A Record by Ry Cooder* (New York: Nonesuch/Perro Verde Records LLC, 2005; CD).

Cooder's well-established and lengthy career as an influential slide guitarist is marked by his continuous attention to the interpreting of music by artists from other countries and cultures. However, ethnic and cultural studies scholar George Lipsitz contends that Cooder's life-long career of interpreting music originally created by people of color verges precariously close to giving the impression of "colonial, anthropological, and folkloric efforts by whites to use the cultures of aggrieved groups for uplift, insight, and emotional renewal" (125-26). "According to this formula," writes Lipsitz, "people of color become [...] 'spiritual bellhops, carriers of experience from which others can benefit'" (126). The former residents of Chavez Ravine become spiritual bellhops in that they are the informative and inspirational source which Cooder exploits. To apply the "spiritual bellhop" argument to the album *Chávez Ravine* suggests an exploitative type of relationship between Cooder and the Ravine. For Lipsitz, the "danger" posed by Cooder's album has to do with the direction of its gaze upon the actual Ravine. He argues that the album's emphasis on "the 'little worlds emptied out' by urban renewal slights the efforts of displaced city dwellers to reconstitute the diversity and plurality of the city in their new suburban surroundings" (129). I interpret this to mean that the album's romanticism over the loss of "the rural feel in urban places" is misdirected: *Chávez Ravine*, to Lipsitz, does not promote a present empowerment of the displaced residents. Viewed from this perspective, the album's representation of the Ravine implies that with the death of its neighborhoods, the lives and culture of its residents have died.

If the role played by the Ravine's former residents is that of "spiritual bellhops," then the cultural theory-based framework of "imperialist nostalgia" offers an appropriate and corresponding context in which to understand Cooder's said exploitative relationship with the Ravine. Characterized by an innate sense of guilt over the past maltreatment and/or destruction of oppressed groups, imperialist nostalgia functions "to establish one's innocence to talk about what one [or one's culture] has destroyed" without having to take responsibility, or feel guilty, for the

effects and repercussions imperialist rule has had on colonized groups (Resaldo 70). The album's message then, in evoking imperialist nostalgia, is that resident displacement—and, as a result, cultural gentrification—are understood as unlawful, yet they portray inevitable effects of modernization. Cooder's album laments over, and celebrates, what has passed. But beneath the album's celebration of what once used to be exists the same type of unequal relationship that fed the process which led to the destruction of the Ravine's neighborhoods. Cooder is the authority voice that speaks on behalf of the Ravine; its residents, in the end, remain politically voiceless and inactive.

However, an understanding of Cooder's *Chávez Ravine* as a work basely driven by nostalgic impulses devalues the collaborative nature of the album's production, the role of the album's influences, and the way both affect the relationship dynamic between Cooder and the Ravine. Lipsitz does acknowledge that the production of *Chávez Ravine* involved numerous musicians from the Mexican American community, yet his larger argument still casts them as “weeds” whose recognized beauty is dependent on Cooder's exposure of them to the rest of the music-listening world (125). Interestingly, Cooder's album and four other creative art forms, which were all produced within a seven-year period, narrate stories about the Ravine and replicate similar representational relationships. These works include Seattle-based photographer Don Normark's 1999 photography collection *Chávez Ravine, 1949: A Los Angeles Story*; the full length dramatic play *Chavez Ravine*, written and first performed by Los Angeles-based Chicano comedy troupe Culture Clash in 2003; Jordan Mechner's 2004 short documentary film *Chávez Ravine: A Los Angeles Story*; and lastly, high school history teacher Ken Aven's 2006 debut novel, *Chavez Ravine Echoes*. Together, these five productions make up a case study that engages with the debate over privileged groups speaking for, or on behalf of, underrepresented groups.

This thesis examines the rich and layered intertextual relationship between these five projects and the representation of Chavez Ravine. Philosopher Linda Alcoff suggests that “if the

dangers of speaking for others result from the possibility of misrepresentation, expanding one's own authority and privilege, and a generally imperialist speaking ritual, then speaking with and to [those represented] can lesson these dangers" (23). Unlike the "spiritual bellhop" and imperialist nostalgia perspectives, Alcoff's conceptual approach, and others that this analysis draws from, emphasize a process of representation that is shared and driven by dialogue. Through the inclusion of resident involvement in the production process and the weaving of narrative elements from both Mexican American and dominant cultural traditions, these projects promote the Ravine's community cultural wealth. Through close readings and textual analysis, this thesis demonstrates how Cooder's album and the four other Ravine projects represent a deliberate move to open up spaces for cross-cultural discussions about the Ravine and the various roles it plays within U.S. cultural history. In fact, these five representations of Chavez Ravine figuratively practice a "speaking to and with" model of intercultural communication between dominant and minority cultures.

Four out of five of the Ravine projects interrelate: Normark's photographs, Mechner's documentary, Culture Clash's play, and Cooder's album. "In order to do music," Cooder says in an interview about the making of his record *Chávez Ravine*, "you have to have a visual" (Humphries 11). The visual inspiration for Chavez Ravine came to Cooder in 2002 when he viewed at an exhibit a series of photographs of the Chavez Ravine community in the late 1940s by Normark (Richardson 74). Prior to his book's publication, Normark had also been at work on a film about Chavez Ravine. As it happened, Normark felt inexperienced with making films and invited documentarian Jordan Mechner, who had contacted Normark after having read a review of his book, to direct the making of the film (Normark, "Interview with Don Normark" 58). Mechner's *Chávez Ravine: A Los Angeles Story* features interviews with the former residents of the Ravine as well as with Normark and uses many of Normark's images of Chavez Ravine for the film's background.

Soon after viewing Normark's exhibit, Cooder purchased two Chavez Ravine prints from him and formed a working relationship with him (Normark, Personal Interview 2007). Cooder later used a number of Normark's photographs to illustrate the liner notes to his album as well as titled the album's opening track, "Poor Man's Shangri-la," after the same phrase used by Normark in his book to describe Chavez Ravine. In addition to this, Cooder also contributed to Jordon Mechner's short documentary film by writing its musical score. Similar to the way Cooder and Mechner made contact with Normark, the long-time Los Angeles-based comedy troupe Culture Clash (Ric Salinas, Richard Montoya, and Herbert Siguenza) also initiated a relationship with the photographer, seeking contact information for the former residents of the Ravine. Culture Clash later invited Normark to attend the play's premier in the spring of 2003 and featured a display of his images in the theater's lobby and used an enlarged section of one photograph as the stage's backdrop. Both Normark and Frank Wilkinson (former Information Director of the L.A. City Housing Authority) were introduced and applauded at the end of the play. Normark recalls, "while we were sitting later, [... Frank] patted me on the knee and said 'you started all this with those photographs'" (Normark, Personal Interview 2007). Ken Aven's novel, *Chavez Ravine Echoes*, published in 2006, a year after Cooder's album, holds many similarities to the other four works; although, according to the available resources, the development of the novel has no direct ties to the works of Normark, Mechner, Cooder, or Culture Clash.

The five productions under discussion develop from two distinct narrative forms: a narrative of victimization and a narrative of resistance. The victimization narrative consists of Ravine residents who are duped out of their homes and land and of a white or privileged Angelino who then speaks ironically on the residents' behalf in an attempt to vindicate their maltreatment by the city of Los Angeles. The resistance narrative, on the other hand, portrays politically and financially organized residents who resist, although unsuccessfully, the city's

encroachment of their land by holding demonstrations in front of City Hall, electing residents from the Ravine to speak on behalf of the community's interests at City Council meetings, filing appeals against the city's use of Eminent Domain to acquire their lands, and, most notably, emphasizing the use of passive resistance during the historically televised city-enforced evictions of the last remaining residents of the Ravine in May of 1959. The five Ravine projects apply a mixture of elements from both the victimization and resistance narratives; such blending of these two narratives suggest that these projects are concerned with speaking to and with audiences from both the dominant and minority communities.

The five Chavez Ravine projects respond to the earlier representations of Chavez Ravine as a slum, emphasizing instead the community's "cultural wealth," and counter-address the issue of the community's lack of visibility in popular culture. Tara Yosso and David Garcia, in their article "'This is No Slum!'," define community cultural wealth "as an array of knowledges, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and used by Communities of Color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression" (154). Normark's photographs provide visual evidence of the community's cultural wealth. The image shown in Figure 2 of two young girls interacting with a nun in front of a church conveys valuable cultural and social information about the relationship between the Ravine community and its church. The photograph of the little boy shown in Figure 3 carries with it an emotional appeal about childhood in the Ravine. In a personal interview I conducted with Normark, he remarked about Figure 3, "everyone loves that boy. It's only background information that he was a poor kid in a neighborhood that got destroyed. Loving that boy has nothing to do with that background information." The four other Ravine productions benefit and, at times, draw from such expressions of cultural and emotional appeal in Normark's photographs.

Despite the projects' appeal to the cultural wealth of the Ravine's neighborhoods, Dodger Stadium stands as a physical, as well as a symbolic, obstacle in efforts to bring the visibility of



Fig. 2. Don Normark. *Santo Niño Church was in Palo Verde*, rpt. in *Chávez Ravine, 1949* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999; print; 110).



Fig. 3. Don Normark. *This is the photograph Frank was holding. Everyone liked this boy, but no one knew his name*, rpt. in *Chávez Ravine, 1949* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999; print; 22).

Chavez Ravine and its cultural wealth to public awareness. Dodger Stadium has functioned as a prominent symbol of modern U.S. culture in the twentieth century. In his discussion of the “master symbol of modernity,” Richard Flores explains that “the new, the modern, the American are marked by the respatialization of property, while the old, the traditional, the Mexican is dissolved into the folkloric, the quaint, the foreign” (157). Literally resting on top of Chavez Ravine—“the old, the traditional, the Mexican”—Dodger Stadium over time has taken on the “hierarchal” quality of a symbol of modernity and has aided in denying visual proof of the past existence of the Ravine’s community. The Chavez Ravine projects bring the community back into public view by reconceptualizing and (re)-respatializing the symbolic relationship between the Ravine’s community and Dodger Stadium.

Don Normark recalls at the end of Mechner’s documentary that when he returned to visit the neighborhoods of Chavez Ravine “a dozen years” after he had photographed it and its residents, all that he could find was Dodger Stadium: “I was driving up these roads and I kept running into Dodger Stadium and I just couldn’t figure it out,” Normark says, “and I thought it must still be there if I could find the right road to get in. But I never could find the right road” (*Chávez Ravine: A Los Angeles Story*). A pamphlet promoting Mechner’s *Chávez Ravine: A Los Angeles Story* describes the film as provoking “a lost Mexican-American village in the heart of downtown L.A.” Describing the community that lived in the Ravine as “lost” yields multiple meanings. For one, it means that the residents “lost” ownership over the lands in the Ravine, that they “lost” what Los Angeles Mayor Norris Poulson called “the hottest battle in California since the war with Mexico” (qtd. in Avila 170). On the other hand, “lost” can refer to a public history of Chavez Ravine not told by its own residents—a history repressed and thus forgotten by the public.

Chapter 1 of this thesis argues that the cultural memories produced in Normark’s *Chávez Ravine, 1949: A Los Angeles Story* form collaboratively between Normark and the former

residents of the Ravine. The use of the word “collaboratively” has a dual meaning. The making of the book itself was collaborative in that its production involved combining Normark’s photographs with the recollections and memories of Chavez Ravine’s former residents. Out of this partnership comes a unique dialogue within the book between the photographs and the residents’ recollections of Chavez Ravine. The photographs and the former residents’ memory of Chavez Ravine represent the community as producing cultural and social wealth and together are a visual and textual testament to Chavez Ravine as having been a productive, versus a degenerative, community of Los Angeles. This photograph/text relationship creates and promotes a “collaborative,” but does not always produce a collective, remembering of Chavez Ravine. The representation of Chavez Ravine and its citizens as resistant or as victims, while evident in the other artistic productions, is not an overt compositional quality of Normark’s photographs. However, there are moments throughout the book’s text where the former residents express in their memories resistant as well as victimized sentiments. This characteristic alone separates Normark’s book from the rest of the artistic productions about Chavez Ravine discussed in this thesis. The proceeding productions about Chavez Ravine are driven less by Normark’s personal desire to reunite his “silent old images” with the residents’ “memories and stories”¹ and more by, as argued in the following chapters, the desire to make a moral, political, or didactic statement about the history of Chavez Ravine and the mistreatment of its residents.

Chapter 2 asserts that rather than exploiting the cultural memories of Chavez Ravine’s residents, *Chávez Ravine: A Record* by Ry Cooder creates, like Normark’s book, a collaborative cultural memory between U.S. dominant culture and the Mexican American community. As feminist theorist Elizabeth Spelman reminds us, “claims of shared human suffering can do as much to reinforce claims of superiority and inferiority as they can to undermine them. It depends

¹ The quotes are taken from the last paragraph of Normark’s introduction in *Chávez Ravine, 1949: A Los Angeles Story* (23).

on how claims are made, who makes them, and to what end” (9). *Chávez Ravine*’s mixture of narrative elements—the use of place names, language, and images—suggest a sophisticated cultural interaction between Cooder, the other artists contributing to the album, and the history and cultural memories of Chavez Ravine. The album does paint the failure of the Los Angeles urban renewal projects of the 1950s as an open wound between the Mexican American and White communities, but not without providing a model for healing that wound. The album’s most intriguing character, “The Space Vato,” as Cooder calls him, is the focal point for the album’s concern with how historical and cultural memories may be used as tools of re-spatialization. This chapter applies Rafael Pérez-Torres’s discussion on Mestizaje consciousness as a way to place Cooder’s album within a Chicano/a musical and cultural context. The album *Chávez Ravine* adopts Chicano music’s concern with issues of location and relation, making it one of the first major mixed-race musical productions in the twenty-first century. As Chapter 2 shows, Ry Cooder relies heavily on allusions of the East Los Angeles music scene as a way to reconstruct the “right road” to acknowledging the cultural worth and political resistance alive in the neighborhoods of Chavez Ravine. In particular, the song “3rd Base, Dodger Stadium” juxtaposes the neighborhood space of Chavez Ravine with the public space of Dodger Stadium and suggests, through the song’s narrator, that the competing histories of the Ravine and Dodger Stadium are reconcilable.

Under discussion in Chapter 3, then, are the ways in which Culture Clash’s play *Chavez Ravine* and Ken Aven’s novel *Chavez Ravine Echoes* attempt to reconcile the competing popular narrative of Chavez Ravine and the popular narratives of Dodger Stadium. While Culture Clash’s play is a narrative of resistance, Aven’s novel is one of victimization. *Chavez Ravine* is satirical, comical, and critical commentary about the Ravine’s history and is told from the perspective of characters forming representations of the twelve families that resisted the city’s offer to buy out their homes (Yosso and García 157). In contrast, Aven uses nostalgic, romantic language that

aims at expressing moral longing to “further the redemption” of the victimized residents of Chavez Ravine (101). This chapter considers what social, cultural, political messages lay beneath each way of representing and remembering Chavez Ravine’s history and seeks answers to such questions as: where, and how, do these two narratives converge and coalesce into a more complete picture of the Ravine’s history; in what ways are the narratives convincing; and, in the end, which cultural and historical memories do each of these works favor and which memories do each of these works compromise?

To conclude the thesis, a short Afterword discusses the ways in which the two major narratives (victimization and resistance) emerging from the recent cultural representations of the Ravine are holding a dialogue, rather than an argument, on how to preserve the memories of Chavez Ravine in the present and into the future.

CHAPTER 1

CREATING MEMORIES: PHOTOGRAPHS AND TEXT

IN DON NORMARK'S *CHÁVEZ RAVINE, 1949: A LOS ANGELES STORY*

A close reading of Don Normark's *Chávez Ravine, 1949: A Los Angeles Story* reveals a complex and dynamic relationship between Normark's photographs and the shared memories that make up the book's text. This photograph/text relationship creates and promotes a "collaborative," but does not always produce a collective, remembering of Chavez Ravine. To demonstrate this unique relationship between the photographs and text, this chapter first considers Normark's compositional techniques and his use of captions and then examines the major themes emerging from the photographs and text. This chapter seeks answers to the following questions: What is the representational nature of the residents' memories and Normark's photographs? For instance, is the representation of Chavez Ravine they collectively produce largely romantic, realistic, or nostalgic? And, what kinds of issues or themes are produced by the memories and photographs?

Normark's photographs of Chavez Ravine and its residents were taken and developed between the fall of 1948 and the spring of 1949 and were published in book form for the first time in 1999 by Chronicle Books.² Placed alongside the photographs in *Chávez Ravine, 1949: A Los Angeles Story* are printed responses to and recollections and memories of the photographs by Chavez Ravine's former residents³, which Normark himself abstracted and transcribed from

² Normark, as he attests to in the introduction, showed five Chavez Ravine prints at Los Angeles County's "Photography Mid-Century" exhibition in 1950 and showed them more recently in the mid-to-late 90s. But between those times, 1949-1998, none of the photographs had been previously published in print.

³ Throughout the rest of the chapter, I refer collectively to the published interview responses of the former residents of Chavez Ravine to Normark's photographs as "memories." I do this in part for convenience. "Memories," while a complicated term, is less cumbersome than calling the texts "interviews." "Memories," as I will use it, signifies the residents' recollections and responses about their old neighborhood. The other impulse for referring to the residents' texts as memories is because Normark himself understands them that way. For example, appearing in the opening pages of the book, he writes in

interviews he conducted with the residents in the mid-to-late 1990s (Normark, Personal Interview 2007). The camera that Normark used to photograph Chavez Ravine and its residents “was a Ciroflex, a cheap copy of the Rolleiflex” (Normark 11). The photographer most commonly holds this Kleenex-box-size camera, unlike the 35mm, vertical at the abdomen and looks down into the view plate located on the top of the camera. This photographic angle, with the lens often below and pointing up at the subject, creates a visual effect—observed throughout the whole of Normark’s book—which gives the appearance of “stature and esteem” to the subjects (Berger 6).

Art curator and critic Maurice Berger has criticized the photographers working for the Farm Security Administration (FSA) in the 1930s for appropriating this “heroic angel” technique, because, as he says, this “pose of the star, the dignitary, the hero [...] rejects the bitterness of desperate times,” stiling the “truth” and “honesty” that documentary photography is said to achieve (6). Normark, in the introduction to his book, describes his compositional style in this way: “I was clearly no threat to anyone. Even my camera forced a passive stance. Holding it at stomach level, I stood bowed before my subject, my eye looking into the top of the camera” (12). In relation to Berger’s criticism of the FSA photographers (many of whom were Normark’s contemporaries, such as Dorothea Lange), Normark denies intentionally using the “heroic angle” for the purpose of appealing to social injustice and/or human suffering (Normark, Personal Interview 2007). Normark’s images do not portray residents of Chavez Ravine as helpless and disadvantaged. On the contrary, Normark’s photographs of Chavez Ravine and its residents picture life lived “a bit more open than those in more conventional American neighborhoods, [...] a life lived] outside their homes, in public, where the stranger’s camera could see” (Normark 12).

his acknowledgments, “I thank all those whose memories revive these old photographs and give heart to this tale” (5).

The “passive stance” of Normark’s camera produces far-reaching landscapes of Chavez Ravine and elevates its residents in his portraiture. For example, seen in Figure Four, this view of the Ravine is breathtaking as much for its expansive horizontal reach across the breadth of the Ravine as for its vertical, elevated stretch above the mountains in the image’s background. Normark’s portraits of the Ravine’s residents, which, in many cases, were photographed from only a few feet away, expose the intimate and detailed daily spaces of the residents’ lives. In addition to the photographs, Normark’s book provides a list of known and remembered nicknames of residents of the Ravine compiled by Chavez Ravine resident Albert “Beto Calavera” Elias. The nicknames, like “Old Buttermilk Sky,” “Pollyseed Molano,” “El Cementerio Andando,” “El Dopy,” and “pancito” to name a few, make their way into the memories of the residents and attest to the verbal wealth of the community.⁴ Along with the use of nicknames throughout the book, Normark’s use of captions plays an important role in establishing a kind of conversational tension between the photographs and the memories.

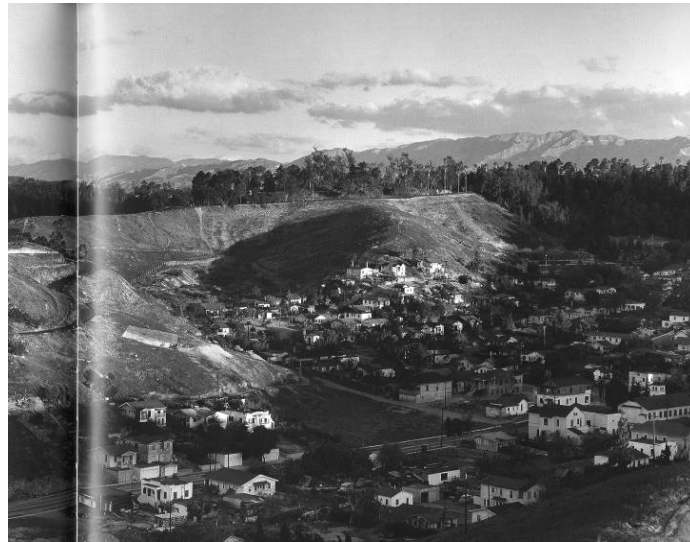


Fig. 4. Don Normark. Untitled, rpt. in *Chávez Ravine, 1949* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999; print; 39).

⁴ Culture Clash uses some of the nicknames from Elias’s list in its play.

Examining, in brief, the ways in which Normark captions, or records the meaning of, his photographs reveals a personal, humane connection between him, his photographs, and the residents of Chavez Ravine. Normark's captions—modest, and sometimes even sparse—typically provide the name/s of the person/s in a photograph, where the photograph was taken, and a short phrase of commentary. The commentary in his captions is usually descriptive. The slim caption to Figure 5, “Climbing the hill to La Loma with an armload of groceries,” leaves the bulk of the photograph's meaning within the photograph. The subtle hint of weight in the caption, through the use of the word “armload,” emphasizes the contrast between the bare hill and the city sprawled out below it and suggests a sense of isolation of the woman and the Ravine from the city.



Fig. 5. Don Normark. *Climbing the hill to La Loma with an armload of groceries*, rpt. in *Chávez Ravine, 1949* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999; print; 35).

For other photographs, Normark's captions are factual (they contain, for example, the person's name, job, or even how s/he died). Figure 6, captioned, "Johnny Johnson, right, rehearsed his Gospel quartet in the family home on Saturday afternoons. They were the only African American family I met in Chávez Ravine," is representative of Normark's ethnographic attention to the Ravine's residents and their culture. For example, the caption favors the importance of music and dance played in the community and points out that the African Americans were a minority in Chavez Ravine. In particular, the photograph details the men's suits and values their facial expressions while singing.



Fig. 6. Don Normark. *Johnny Johnson, right, rehearsed his Gospel quartet in the family home on Saturday afternoons. They were the only African American family I met in Chávez Ravine, rpt. in Chávez Ravine, 1949* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999; print; 31).



Fig. 7. Don Normark. *He had beckoned me in from the glaring road to the shade of his porch. He spoke no English, and I spoke no Spanish, but we conversed. He compared me to his favorite grandson. He with his big hands and lean working frame felt at times like my grandfather again. We got on well, rpt. in Chávez Ravine, 1949* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999; print; 48).

At times, Normark's captions call upon the residents', as well Normark's own, memory to provide information and give meaning to a photograph. A long caption to Figure 7, for example, reads, "He had beckoned me in from the glaring road to the shade of his porch. He spoke no English, and I spoke no Spanish, but we conversed. He compared me to his favorite grandson. He with his big hands and lean working frame felt at times like my grandfather again. We got on well" (Normark 48). Unlike the caption of Figure 6, the caption to Figure 7 imposes, rather than implies, a personal connection upon the viewer of the photograph. The effect, with Normark likening the man in the photograph to a grandfather, and Normark a grandson, is an intense importance on the role of men in the families of the Ravine. Indeed, Figure 7 is demonstrative of how Normark's memory contributes to the book's collaborative remembering of Chavez Ravine. It is the residents and their memories, however, which are the book's main concern. In general, Normark arranges the photographs and memories thematically.

In many cases he is successful at matching memories of the former residents that recall specific people, local characters, or places of the Ravine with an image of that specific person or place.

For instance, in response to the image in Figure 7 are the four following recollections:

Murphy Hernandez: There's Don Bernardo. Boy, that man used to dance. He was king of the hill, that old man. He had a lot of kids. Mean. They were all mean. I think one still lives in Tijuana.

Rudy Flores: Bernardo Ramirez had a lot of property. He'd rent for ten dollars a month to guys who didn't have wives or nothing. Rented them a little room. If they couldn't pay, they worked for him building terraces. He bought an empty lot and would dig steps and plant cactus. On the bottom he made it so you could park cars. He would rent the parking space.

Frank Sanchez: Everybody liked Don Bernardo. You could get credit at his store. He'd let you have it, if you were short on money. He was liked around the neighborhood.

John Rivera: Our neighborhood had about twenty-five yucca plants there. Don Bernardo Ramirez used to come and drain them. He would ferment the juice. Make tequila, I guess. (Normark 49)

Normark's caption to this image, with its personal and intimate description perhaps influenced by his lens's attention to Don Bernardo's "big" hands stands in contrast to the memories of these four men. The dominant themes expressed by the four men in response to Figure 7 emerge rather randomly (dancing, the temperament of Don Bernardo's children and his business habits, making tequila from Yucca plants) and are held together by a shared fondness for Don Bernardo, a fondness which, in this example, begins with Normark's image. Often, the memories of the former residents, as in the responses to Figure 7, evoke stories not seen or observed directly from the photograph.

In situations where the memories do not match directly, or speak, to a specific photograph, Normark pairs groups of memories with images that are visually expressive or suggestive of the common theme surfacing from the memories. For example, the memories of four residents who remember working on migrant farms as children are paired with Figure 8, captioned in Normark's book as "Iladro Madrid finishes loading his car, vintage even then, for a



Fig. 8. Don Normark. *Iladro Madrid finishes loading his car, vintage even then, for a trip to the picking fields*, rpt. in *Chávez Ravine, 1949* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999; print; 63). trip to the picking fields” (63).

trip to the picking fields” (63). While the memories of these four residents do not recall, in this photograph, Iladro Madrid, they do, however, recall the common trip taken every summer to pick cotton, grapes, or raisins. Rose Marie Lopez remembers, as the photograph illustrates, packing up, “with a mattress and everything,” and leaving Chavez Ravine for the summer to work in the fields; as a child, she remembers, “I thought it was a vacation” (Normark 62). Albert Elias remembers that “a lot of families drove together just in case there was a flat or a car broke down” as well as and how little money his family made it back to Chavez Ravine with one summer (Normark 62). Another resident, Sally Muñoz, recalls returning from the fields late in the summer and missing the first month and a half of school. “I could never catch up,” she says; “It got to a point were I went to school just to be going, I guess. One of my brothers graduated. He was the only one of seven that did” (Normark 62). While having little or no money or missing school is expressed without nostalgia, there is a certain tone of joy, found in these residents’ memories of

working the fields. Trini Hernandez, for example, remembers having “a lot of fun” and being a part of a group of pickers whose boss, Kruger, won first prize for best raisins. “Everybody was real happy,” he recalls (Normark 62). Normark’s image of Iladro is subtle enough in its attention to his open-mouthed smile (evidence of happiness) and stained shirt (evidence of work) that it becomes in the recollections of the residents representative/iconic of migrant workers. Along with migrant work as a commonly shared memory between residents of Chavez Ravine, there are many other important shared memories voiced within Normark’s book.

In particular, memories of music and food, of Pachucos, dancing and teenage fights, of sons fighting in the war, of boxing and an organized youth club, and of marriage, church, church processions and curanderas all serve as testaments of the lives lived in the Ravine. Sally Anchondo relates a story about being instructed as a child by her grandfather, Luis Muñoz, to sell fruit to the neighbors. “If you don’t go,” she remembers her grandfather saying, “you are not going to have food in your mouth” (Normark 42). “So,” says Anchondo, “we’d go sell bananas and the people would look at them and feel them. By the time we found a customer, the bananas were too soft to buy them. So my sister and I would sit up in the hills and eat them ourselves” (Normark 42). Tony Montez, who, with his father, was hired to play music at neighborhood parties, recalls, “those houses [in the Ravine] were small. When they had parties they’d put the furniture out in the backyard. [...] We played boleros, cumbias, sometimes waltzes, border music, popular stuff” (Normark 42). While these memories may attest to the residents’ lack of money and small house size, they certainly speak against the notion that the cultural standard of living in the Ravine was low.

The strongest and most recurring memories the residents recall are the events which led them to move away from Chavez Ravine in the early 1950s. From a letter dated July 15th, 1988, to Vin Scully (the radio personality for the L.A. Dodgers) and the “Whole Dodger Organization,” and reprinted in Normark’s book, Natalie Ramirez writes:

Last night, July 14th, 1988, I watched your special on the 30th Anniversary of the Dodgers and KTTV, and I must tell you it made me very angry! [...] I want to let you know at the start that I am a very big fan of the Dodgers and Vin Scully, but how dare you call Chávez Ravine a wasteland or a dump. [...] No one wants to acknowledge the fact that people lived there. Maybe it wasn't Beverly Hills, but it was home to a lot of people, my family included. Doesn't anyone want to acknowledge us because we are Mexicans? Or is it because we were told that our homes would be destroyed to make room for low rent housing? Alright, the people have all moved away and all the houses are gone. But please don't keep referring to it as a dump or wasteland. The people all loved their homes. (127)

In all cases, the memories reproduced and printed in Normark's book match the intensity and emotionalism expressed in Ramirez's letter to the Dodgers about Chavez Ravine as a home instead of a "wasteland." Some of the residents' memories of leaving the Ravine rightly contain tones of bitterness and anger; other recollections provided by the residents reveal more sadness than anger. Nevertheless, examples of each express resistant as well as victimizing speech.

One account in Normark's book of actual community resistance comes from Geneva Williams, who remembers going house to house with a neighbor "with petitions against allowing the Dodgers to build a stadium" (117).⁵ Before Williams organized a petition against Dodger Stadium, she had also served her community by taking the Air Raid Precaution count for the Ravine in which she "saw the conditions [of the homes in the Ravine]" (116). Williams remembers that "there were some very nice homes, but there were several that barely had a roof over their heads" (116). "So, later," she recalls,

I saw some sense to what the housing authority told us they were doing. [...] There were a lot of holdouts. Among them there was one woman I will never forget. We had been neighbors and together in the improvement association. She was Italian, married to a French fellow. She was almost crazy she was so angry about losing her home. When I drove by, she would lean on her four-foot chainlink fence and spit at me. I mean there was a lot of real strong feeling about all this. She absolutely hated me because [the housing authority] didn't want my home. (116)

⁵ Perhaps based on or influenced by this reference, Culture Clash's character Maria from their play *Chavez Ravine* is depicted as a community organizer who encourages Ravine residents to vote against the proposition allowing the Dodgers to move into Chavez Ravine.

Another woman from the Ravine, Carol Jacquez, remembers that losing her home in the Ravine had a profound impact on her future as an activist:

We moved from Palo Verde when I was nine, in September of 1952. About the same time, my brother was found to have leukemia, and he died in December of '52. I was really angry. I had lost every thing that I knew, everything I'd been so happy with, and then I lost my brother. I believe that anger turned me toward political action, starting with the Chicano movement. I turned against the system and fought injustice because I felt that I had suffered a great injustice. [...] My thinking about who I am, and what I believe, was focused by that political activism. That probably would not have happened had I not felt so uprooted and at such a loss when we were moved out of Chávez Ravine. (53)

Both Williams and Jacquez attest to the impact that the displacement of the residents of Chavez Ravine had on them as well as the importance of what happened in Chavez Ravine in their roles as community activists. Williams' memory is descriptive of divisions that were created between those residents either who were not chosen for displacement (as was the case for many residents in the Ravine community of Solano) or who sold to the city versus those residents who acted as "hold-outs" against the city. On the other hand, Jacquez's memory is directed more at how the "injustice" that took place at Chavez Ravine and her feelings of uprootedness shaped her move into political activism during the Chicano Movement. To be sure, there is a significant difference in how these two residents experienced and used political agency as described in their memories. Williams, for instance, claims a political agency during the displacements by petitioning the Dodger move into the Ravine, which gives the impression of resistant behavior. In contrast, Jacquez's memory records a sense of victimization; for her, the injustice she and her family experienced during this time period led to her later political involvement in the Chicano Movement. This distinction is not meant to discredit or to take away the impact that this event had on Jacquez but is meant to point out the book's success at demonstrating the complexity of the residents' position. Jacquez's and Williams's memories suggest how the other memories in Normark's book, while capturing cultural unity, also celebrate difference.

Normark's photographs alone do not come close to accurately illustrating the anger and frustration felt by the residents, such as when Jacquez and Williams recall the emptying out of the community. At times the photographs and the responses to them are ambiguous and left open for interpretation. The picture of the woman sitting in a leather-backed armchair, in Figure 9, and captioned "Unknown woman, La Loma," appears near the end of Don Normark's *Chavez Ravine*,

1949: A Los Angeles Story. Across the page from the photograph, Normark writes in italics:

A few people seemed to be known to everyone, but there are those whose names are yet to be found. There have been guesses, mistaken identities, look-alikes. Often a kind of mental thrashing about occurred, stirring the deepest pools of memory. And sometimes resolution was slow to settle, as in the following exchange between Alicia Arevalo Baca, who spoke first, and her lifelong friend Kekito Pacheco.

Es tu tía, no?

No, that is not my tía.

Oh, that is not your tía Abrana?

No, my tía never wore that.

Oh, I see, that is not your tía.

No, that is not her. Who is that? (130)

The woman's forward yet upright posture, with her elbows casually hanging off the armrests, might, to some, call forth such descriptors as trust, confidence, pride. To other viewers, the woman's posture may be better interpreted as that of independence and even defiance/defensiveness. The image's composition—that the woman, wearing an embroidered skirt (which strikes this viewer as representative of her ethnic/cultural background and heritage) is haloed, above and behind her, by three separate portraits of men—reveals the relevant issues of



Fig. 9. Don Normark. *Unknown woman, La Loma*, rpt. in *Chávez Ravine, 1949* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999; print; 131).

class, race, gender roles and, no less important, the issues of family and tradition within the domestic sphere.⁶ Normark's lament, here, on the limits of memory's capacity to agree upon details of past events and familiar faces, such as the woman in Figure 9, strikes at the core of this book's desire to remember. And even if Kekito and Alicia never agree upon who the woman in the photograph is, the dialogue "*of mental thrashing about [...], stirring the deepest pools of memory*" between themselves and the "unknown woman" continues.

⁶ I have interpreted this photograph's known space—this one corner of the room seen in the image—with the portraits of men on the wall and the chair with an ashtray sitting on one arm, as a metaphorically masculine space. This reading suggests that the woman here sits in a prideful, if not confident and defiant/independent, manner and that the image transmits messages about the way the dynamic between men's and woman's gender roles are challenged and defined within the domestic spaces of the home.

CHAPTER 2

THE SPACE VATO IS WHITE?: MIXED-RACE IDENTITY

IN *CHÁVEZ RAVINE: A RECORD BY RY COODER*

In a review of *Chávez Ravine: A Record by Ry Cooder*, from *Lacitybeat.com*, Chris Morris writes that Ry Cooder plays a “utility” role in the album. Morris implies that Cooder has a singular function: to give voice to the few white “racist” characters included in the album’s narrative. Morris’s pigeon-holing of Cooder’s identity in *Chávez Ravine* is short-sighted and misleading. No “utility” role, Cooder’s balance of multiple casts within the album—most notably as producer, co-songwriter, musical ethnographer, archivist, and even an alien—represents a border space of cultural play. This chapter explores the commonalities between Chicano music and Ry Cooder’s *Chávez Ravine*, proposing alternative ways in which to view Cooder’s relationship with Chavez Ravine and the role his whiteness plays in representing the Ravine and its residents. Rafael Pérez-Tores defines Chicano music as a “hybrid creation, one that acknowledges both African American and Latino art forms and that evokes cultural as well as, at times, historical and political connection to Chicano and Latino social communities” (88). Cooder’s album is such a “hybrid,” mixed-race production, blending musical, historical, and visual elements from Mexican American, African American, and White/Popular Culture. Placing Cooder’s *Chávez Ravine* within the context of Chicano music resolves the conflict between Cooder’s whiteness (the relationship of power and authority implied in the album’s subtitle, “*A Record by Ry Cooder*”) and the Mexican American identity of the album’s music.

Parallel to the authorial conflict in Cooder’s album, a similar contradiction exists within Chicano music between lyrics that ground content in Chicano-specific spaces and its tendency to incorporate a variety of musical traditions accessible to wider audiences (Pérez-Tores 88).

“Contemporary Chicano music represents an incongruity,” writes Pérez-Tores, “between its

desire to demarcate an expressive cultural identity and its incorporation of numerous musical influences” (88-89). He further explains that this “incongruity” in Chicano music consists of two principals that make up “the horizons of Chicano music”: a principal of location and a principal of relation. On the one hand, the “locational principle” aims at singling out an audience that identifies itself as Chicano by applying language signifiers such as the Spanish slang variant known as Caló. On the other hand, the “relational principal,” often in the form of “numerous musical influences,” allows Chicano music to relate to other ethnic identities and reach larger, mainstream audiences (89). The presence of both the locational and relational principals in *Chávez Ravine* attests to a concern with Chicano music’s influence on U.S. popular music and vice-versa. In particular, the “Space Vato”—Cooder’s own invention and the vehicle which he uses to narrate *Chávez Ravine*’s story—symbolically embodies within itself the album’s Mexican American subject matter (locational) and, at the same time, Cooder’s whiteness (relational), through which the album’s story of the Ravine reaches a wider, more popular audience.

Cooder’s Space Vato, as a model of cross-cultural communication, moves fluidly between Mexican American and White identities, opening up conversational spaces in which to discuss the history and memory of Chavez Ravine across racial, ethnic and cultural boundaries. In *Wilderness Visions: The Western Theme in Science Fiction*, David Mogen writes that humankind’s exploration into space affords answers “to such problems as overpopulation, depletion of natural resources, cultural stagnation, and the loss of freedom and opportunity for the individual” (40). Alien abduction, or flight into alternative “spaces,” is a popular metaphor accessible to both oppressed and oppressing social groups. A passage from Eric Avila’s *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight* describes how racially subversive qualities of science fiction film were appropriated by government organizations, such as the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation, in order to eradicate the mixed/ethnic element from white communities:

HOLC officials deemed communities [...] as “honeycombed” [...], underscoring a perception of blacks and Mexicans as vermin. Such descriptions reveal the extent at which science cinema with its discursive emphasis on invasion, infestation, and infiltration, encompassed a set of images and words that found more consequential forms of expression in official assessments of urban property values. (97)

Cooder’s creation of the Space Vato reclaims such derogatory labels as “illegal aliens” and “immigrants” in an attempt to socially and spatially empower the Mexican American/Chicano presence among the dominance of White political space. As recent evidence to this Chicano reclaiming of the term “illegal aliens,” Richard Rodriguez in 2006 observed that the marches of hundreds of thousands of Mexican Americans that spring concerning the Judiciary Committee’s amended immigration bill were less about political matters than about matters of family. “In Houston and Boston, in Phoenix and in San Jose, Calif.,” writes Rodriguez in an article for *Salon.com*, “what we saw were not exactly ‘protests,’ nor were they political demonstrations, primarily. We were seeing huge family gatherings, celebrations of the clan.” Too, the memories excavated from the representation of Chavez Ravine in Cooder’s album are about discovering the familiar and intimate spaces of home among the alienating image of Dodger Stadium.

Cooder is certainly not the first to explore the relationship between Los Angeles Mexican Americans and the theme of alien invasion. A section of Judith Baca’s mural “The Great Wall of Los Angeles” depicts a scene in which a massive disc-shaped baseball stadium, equipped with beaming neon yellow lights, hangs heavy over a few quiet houses. Avila identifies the alien theme working within the mural: “Baca represents the Dodgers as the aliens who invade and destroy a peaceful settlement of indigenous Angelenos” (170). Cooder’s use of the alien encounter theme is different. Curiously, Michael C. McMillen’s illustration of the alien spacecraft on the front cover of Cooder’s album takes the shape of a porkpie hat—an essential part of a Zoot Suiter’s outfit (Clark 122). Instead of Whites (in the form of Dodger Stadium) as the alien invaders, the representation of Cooder’s Space Vato on the album’s cover alludes, in part, to

Mexican American culture. The image of the Pachuco-hat spaceship calls attention back to the inflammatory rhetoric surrounding the news coverage of the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943 and the fear of “Mexican” infiltration into the “White” sections of new L.A. subdivisions. While the image of the spacecraft on the album’s cover is ambiguous as to what kind of invader it is, the album’s songs portray a sympathetic character in the Space Vato. In an interview conducted February of 2006 in *Mix*, Cooder says, “[the Space Vato is] not trying to scare anybody. Instead of War of the Worlds [sic], the Space Vato actually wants to dance and party and check out these Mexican girls in the neighborhood and so forth” (Clark 122).

The other images provided in *Chávez Ravine*’s liner notes (a map, photographs, architectural drawings and sketches, illustrations, and even a Walter Kelly cartoon) are the visual counterparts to, and provide critical interaction with the sentiment of, the album’s music. The illustration on the cover of the album’s jewel case and the photograph on the album’s liner notes both suggest a theme of invasion. The “invasion” in each image conveys the fears and realities of both the Mexican American and White communities in Los Angeles. The alien invasion depicted in the jewel case illustration reminds the viewer of the post-war hysteria of communism and the concern with urban renewal expansion symbolized by the bulldozer and its skeleton driver. The photograph on the liner notes cover directs its attention to the failure of public housing in Los Angeles and is a painful reminder to the residents of Chavez Ravine of the Dodger “invasion” of their lands. Cooder borrowed the photograph from the *Los Angeles Times*; the picture captures a caravan of earth-pushers flowing down a steep grade at the Dodger Stadium construction site in the Chavez Ravine Valley (ca. 1960). Most likely moving dirt from the top of the hill to the bottom to level it out, these construction scrapers take the form of a symbolic metaphor for the forgetting of history versus erasing/reassembling history—the laying of old earth in a new location so that its appearance looks new. In between these visual notions of invasion and alienation, the liner notes contain photographs (a mixture of images of Chavez Ravine and artists

who played on the album) and various housing plan sketches. The photographs humanize the story of Chavez Ravine while the housing plans are a reminder of the failed idealism of the Elysian Park Heights housing project once proposed for Chavez Ravine.⁷

Space in the album *Chávez Ravine* manifests itself in two ways: historical and ahistorical space. In one way, space in the album is the product of the social interaction and conflict between Whites and Mexican Americans in Los Angeles and is rooted in a 1950s saturated by anticommunist ideology and urban redevelopment. The neighborhoods of Chavez Ravine, in the first track of the album, are presented as an isolated utopia, a Mexican American “Shangri-la.” However, the rest of the songs on the album demonstrate a less static and more dynamic representation of the Ravine. Unlike in the album’s opening track, “Poor Man’s Shangri-la,” where the Ravine is described as occupying a space “lost in time,” the community of Chavez Ravine is described in other songs on the album as being in interaction with, and affected by, outside cultural and historical forces. Examples of this cultural and social interaction with other communities are found in track two, “Onda Callejera,” and track seven, “Chinito Chinito.” “Onda Callejera” comments on the inherent racism underlining the Zoot Suit Riots and how the riots contributed to the city of Los Angeles’s view that Chavez Ravine was a blighted region infested with roaming gangs of Mexican hoodlums. The playful “Chinito Chinito” tells the story of two Mexican American women heckling a Chinese man. Unexpectedly, in songs such as “It’s Just Work for Me,” “In My Town,” and “Don’t Call Me Red”—all written and composed by Cooder—*Chávez Ravine* also delivers a White perspective. While Cooder does take on a “White,” indifferent voice in “It’s Just Work for Me” and “In My Town,” he also celebrates a White hero, Frank Wilkinson, in “Don’t Call Me Red.”

⁷ The background housing plans used in the album’s liner notes are not associated with the designs for Elysian Park Heights. The album gives credit to Charles R. Imbrecht, a former California politician and energy advocate who passed away at the age of 50 in 2000, for the plans.

In contrast to the album's historical space, the space that the Space Vato offers the residents of Chavez Ravine in track nine, "El U.F.O. Cayó," is an outerspace—a space devoid of history. On a "mission of prophecy," the Space Vato foresees that "there are some Anglos who want to take away your lands and put up a baseball stadium" and instructs the residents to

Levanten sus chivas, y vamonos de volada,
 Porque nuestro barrio, nos lo van a cambiar, eso vato.
 [...]
 Agaren sus tambiaches y salganse antes de que
 Los apachuren. Y súbanse al platillo volador, El U.F.O.

(Pick up your goats, and let's go real quick,
 Because our barrio, it's going to change, man.
 [...]
 Grab your things, and let's get out of here before
 They squash you. Get into my flying saucer, El U.F.O.).
 (Cooder, Liner Notes 29)

This outerspace is largely an "other-"space of refuge and offers the residents a place of escape from the "gabacho" (Whites) and from a repressive history. At the end of the song the residents ignore the Space Vato's warning, claiming that "ninguno les creemos. En América vivimos. / Somos dueños con derechos de la tierra / que nacimos" (None of us believed [the Space Vato]. We live in America. / We are landowners with rights in this place where / we were born) (Cooder, Liner Notes 30).

The fictional alien encounter narrative enables Cooder to demonstrate the historical importance of the "fight" over Chavez Ravine to a broader, largely White audience. Both in Cooder's fictional and in the historical accounts, there is an effort by representatives from Chavez Ravine to protest the taking of their land on the precept that they, as citizens of the United States, belong to a social and political space shared with Whites. The lyrics to track twelve, "Ejercito Militar," written and composed by Rita Arvizu, suggest that the only space left for the residents of Chavez Ravine is that of memory, a space "which you don't forget over time" (Cooder, Liner Notes 39). Pérez-Torres writes that "the connections between contemporary musical production

and historical moments of ethnic formation or political struggle evoke a cultural memory even within the potentially unsettling fun house of postmodern mass culture” (95). To be sure, *Chávez Ravine* brings a Mexican American cultural memory to the rock-music market.

Language, musical styles, and instrumentation in *Chávez Ravine* also contain elements of Pérez-Torres’s locational (relating to the Chicano identity) and relational (relating to non-Chicano identities) principles, demonstrating how Cooder’s album creates a border space between Mexican American cultural memory and popular memory. Track two, “Onda Callejera,” describes the role that the naval reserve armory—located in Chavez Ravine—played in the Zoot Suit Riots. The opening line reads, “Era la media noche, when oimos the scream” (Cooder, Liner Notes 11). The transitions from the English “when” to the Spanish “oimos,” (meaning “we heard”), back to the English “scream” literally represent a fluid movement between the speaker’s use of these two languages. Alternatively, this code switching may be understood as a metaphor for the historically-noted struggle over social space between White sailors stationed at the naval reserve armory and the Mexican American youths living in Chavez Ravine. Historian Eduardo Obregón Pagán explains how White sailors and Mexican American youths saw the “border space” between downtown and Chavez Ravine differently. For the White officers and sailors, the streets were “public”; however, for the Mexican American youths, these same spaces and places “had yet to become ‘public’ regardless of the changes around them, and they actively resisted the unwelcome presence of outsiders” (Pagán 154). Track seven, “Chinito Chinito,” originally recorded by Don Tosti in 1949, also expresses this aggression towards outsiders, although, in this case, the outsider is not white but Chinese. The song is told from the perspective of two young Mexican American women who taunt a Chinese laundry man as he walks by on the street. The China man’s change box rattles as the women call out after him:

Chinito, chinito, toca la “malaca,” chinito.
Chinito, chinito, no “plecupes” más.
Chinito, chinito, me lava la “lopa.”

Chinito, chinito, no “plecupes” más.

(Chinito, chinito, play your maraca, Chinito.

Chinito, chinito, don’t worry no more.

Chinito, chinito, wash my clothes.

Chinito, chinito, don’t worry no more). (Cooder, Liner Notes 23)

The women in the song mock the Chinese man’s use of Spanish words, his habit of replacing the “r” with an “l”: *malaca* for *maraca*, *plecupes* for *preocupes* (worry), and *lopa* for *ropa* (clothes). The Spanish code switching and language play in “Onda Callejera” and “Chinito Chinito,” in this case, represents locational ways Mexican Americans in Los Angeles reclaim social space within the city.

Chávez Ravine’s use of Caló, a dialect of Spanish commonly used in Los Angeles by Mexican American youths in the early twentieth century, also works locationally. “Los Chucos Suaves,” track six on *Chávez Ravine*, contains lyrics written in Caló and features the Afro-Cuban musical style of the guaracha. Originally recorded by Lalo Guerrero y Sus Cinco Lobos in Los Angeles in 1949, the song’s speaker favors Mexican and Cuban dances over the popular African American dances. Translated in the album’s liner notes into English, the song’s speaker instructs: “We used to dance the swing, / Boogie-Woogie, Jitterbug. / But that’s past. / [...] Cool pachucos dance the rumba / Dance the rumba and get down. They dance guaracha real cool” (Cooder, Liner Notes 21). Ethnomusicologist Steven Loza, in his analysis of code switching between Caló and Spanish in “Los Chucos Suaves,” points out how Caló’s tendency to drop the last syllable of conjugated verbs corresponds to the format of the Afro-Cuban influenced guaracha. “For example,” Loza writes, “many words ending in *ado* are often transformed to one-syllable, fused phonetic of *a’o* (e.g., *abusado* = *abusa’o* and *aguitado* = *aguita’o* in the third verse),” conforming to the meter of the guaracha (180). The speech pattern of Caló corresponds to the greater message of the song’s lyrics and portrays a Latino/a cultural identity.

Interestingly, Cooder's rerecording of "Los Chucos Suaves" on *Chávez Ravine* features a few adaptive changes from Guerrero's original 1949 recording. Cooder's album restores the use of Caló in its recording of "Los Chucos Suaves" and includes Guerrero on lead vocals.⁸ In the album's liner notes, however, the lyrics to the song are printed in English and in standard Spanish, but not in Caló. So, when listening to *Chávez Ravine*'s "Los Chucos Suaves," one hears Guerrero dropping the inflections (unique to Caló) off the last word in each line, but sees in the lyrics provided in the liner notes the standard Spanish endings. Moreover, Cooder arranges the song differently. In Guerrero's original recording a short, raspy "pachuco rap," backed by a piano and trumpet, unfolds in the middle of the song; Guerrero raps in Caló, "Nel eso del swing / ya chale ve, una buena rumba" (say goodbye to swing now / and try a good rumba) (*Pachuco Boogie* 24). Instead of the African American influenced swing, Guerrero's rap encourages the audience to associate with Latin American dances. In contrast, Cooder's arrangement of "Los Chucos Suaves" replaces Guerrero's rap with a saxophone solo played by Gil Bernal. Bernal, a Mexican American, is best known for his slow, stuttering sax intros on classic rock-and-roll tracks such as The Robins's "Smokey Joe's Café." A symbolic move, Bernal's sax solo alludes to Mexican American musicians' contributions to early R&B and rock-and-roll in the United States. The effect of recording the song in Caló but printing its corresponding lyrics in Spanish and swapping out Guerrero's original rap for a Gil Bernal sax is a "Los Chucos Suaves" that is linguistically accessible to general audiences while musically retaining its "Chicano" essence.

The locational principal and the relational principal in Cooder's *Chávez Ravine* also take symbolic forms within place names mentioned throughout the album. For example, the lyrics to "A Poor Man's Shangri-la," having first gone "up a road that is lost in time," familiarize the

⁸ Invited to participate in the recording of *Chávez Ravine*, Guerrero recorded three original songs for Cooder's album; "Corrido de Boxeo" was composed especially for the album while "Los Chucos Sauves" and "Barrio Viejo" had been previously recorded. Having passed away shortly before the release of *Chávez Ravine* in 2005 at the age of ninety, these songs are Guerrero's last recordings.

listener to names (e.g. Lil' Julian Herrera and "El Monte" American Legion Stadium) important to the history of East Los Angeles music. The opening narrative to "Poor Man's Shangri-la," provided in the album's liner notes, intentionally uses place names and artists to attach "ideas of connection, home, identity, and place" (Pérez-Torres 89) to Chavez Ravine:

It's night in Los Angeles. A traveling Space Vato is trying to get oriented, honing in on a local radio signal. "Lonely Lonely Nights," by Lil' Julian Herrera, sounds just right; he's been out there for so long now. The Radio DJ chants, "El Monte Saturday night," over and over. Why El Monte? Looking down, he sees a good-size patch of ground surrounded by city lights in every direction. It looks easy, beckoning. He sets his little spacecraft down, and steps out to look around. What does he see? (Cooder, Liner Notes 4)

Lil' Julian Herrera and El Monte American Legion Stadium are one set of many historical references throughout the album's text, evoking a cultural memory of the Los Angeles Chicano rock-and-roll scene in the 1950s and '60s. This cultural memory aids in a Mexican American re-telling of Chavez Ravine's story and creates what Pérez-Torres calls, "a historically conscious counternarrative" (95).

El Monte American Legion Stadium and Lil' Julian Herrera symbolize the locational principal, speaking directly to Mexican Americans and working together to locate the height of the Chicano rock-and-roll scene within greater Los Angeles. El Monte American Legion Stadium was one of several venues in Los Angeles County where young Mexican American artists such as Lil' Julian Herrera could play to teenage crowds wanting to hear African American and Chicano-influenced rock-and-roll. Johnny Otis, who co-wrote the local hit "Lonely, Lonely Nights" with Herrera and promoted and produced Herrera, described Lil' Julian as a performer with mediocre singing ability but with a stage charisma comparable to that of the black rhythm-and-blues man James Brown, eventually earning Herrera the notoriety of East L.A.'s first teenage idol (Reyes and Waldman 33). Cooder's invocation-like calling of El Monte American Legion Stadium and Lil' Julian Herrera ignites the Chicano cultural memory that is present throughout the album.

However, the Caribbean sound of “Poor Man’s Shangri-la”—in addition to the Space Vato’s visit to Chavez Ravine—resists such locational placement, speaking more to ways Chicano music and culture relate to other cultures. The end of “Poor Man’s Shangri-la” creates the complex image of the Space Vato receiving radio signals from a local Los Angeles DJ. Ry Cooder, on lead vocals, sings, “Lil’ Julian singing soft and low / Los Angeles down below / DJ says, we got to go,” then chants, “To El Monte, El Monte, El Monte, pa El Monte” (Cooder, Liner Notes 9). Cooder’s repetitive crooning of “El Monte,” which, within the song’s narrative, is broadcast into outerspace, symbolically suggests that places like El Monte American Legion Stadium were accessible to others outside the Mexican American community. In fact, Matt Garcia argues that the appearance of White, African American and Chicano bands at El Monte American Legion Stadium is evidence of intercultural exchange. “Created within the context of the ethnically diverse environment of Southern California dance halls,” writes Garcia, “music emerging from this scene possessed a broad-based, cross-cultural appeal, which facilitated understanding among the racially diverse audience” (202). By the end of “Poor Man’s Shangri-la,” the locational symbols of El Monte and Lil’ Julian Herrera transform into relational ones.

The history of singer Lil’ Julian Herrera and his disappearance from L.A.’s music scene is obscure and imaginative and pairs well with the playfulness of *Chávez Ravine*’s narrative. Loza cites one source that speculates that Herrera was not Mexican American but Hungarian by birth (82). Moreover, all sources agree that sometime around 1960, Herrera mysteriously disappeared. Popular accounts and suspicions of Herrera’s whereabouts, today, range from his presumed death, to either being jailed or living a life in hiding (Reyes and Waldman 33). At the time of Lil’ Julian’s disappearance, Johnny Otis recalls an officer who approached him at his record company, flashing a picture of Herrera and asking for a one “Ron Gregory,” a runaway (Reyes and Waldman 33). Of course, if one believes Herrera’s supposed Hungarian background, the racial irony is in the actual ethnicity of Lil’ Julian Herrera as well as in his convincing

performance as a Chicano pop star. Similarly, through the invention of the Space Vato, Cooder, too, passes seamlessly between a White and Mexican American identity within the album *Chávez Ravine*.

Chávez Ravine: An Album by Ry Cooder expresses Chicano music's trend of incorporating multiraciality within its music, the Space Vato symbolizing the possibility of a shared "space in contemporary culture" (Pérez-Torres 107) between Mexican Americans and cultural outsiders. Cooder writes in the narrative introduction to track fourteen, "3rd Base, Dodger Stadium," that "the U.F.O. is never coming back" (Liner Notes 43). If the appearance of the Space Vato in "Poor Man's Shangri-la," represents spatial possibility and historical reconfiguration, then the Space Vato's exit in "El U.F.O. Cayó," signals the closing of Chavez Ravine's representational reformation. One way to interpret the Space Vato's disappearance from the middle of the album's narrative is that, in the Vato's leaving, the residents of Chavez Ravine reclaim authority and voice in the telling of their history to the rest of Los Angeles and beyond. In "3rd Base, Dodger Stadium," the speaker, a parking lot attendant, informs the listener,

2nd base, right over there,
I see grandma in her rocking chair,
Watching linens flapping in the breeze,
And all the fellows choosing up their teams

Hand over hand on that Louisville
Crowning the top, king of the hill.
Mound to home, sixty feet.
Baseball been very good to me. (Cooder, Liner Notes 44)

The song places the figurative process of uncovering Chavez Ravine's cultural significance in the voice of a former resident of Chavez Ravine. The raising of "grandma" out of the "cement" of buried memory and up to the surface of second base merges the speaker's love for baseball and his home. Chapter Three of this thesis, then, explores in depth how Culture Clash's play *Chavez Ravine* and Ken Aven's novel *Chavez Ravine Echoes* resolve this symbolic confrontation

between the locational space of the Ravine neighborhoods and the relational space of Dodger Stadium.

CHAPTER 3

UNBURYING THE RAVINE: SYMBOLISM IN CULTURE CLASH'S

CHAVEZ RAVINE AND KEN AVEN'S CHAVEZ RAVINE ECHOES

Chavez Ravine is remembered by some as a group of predominantly Mexican American neighborhoods. At the same time, Chavez Ravine is also the site of Dodger Stadium, the neighborhoods' replacement and, in its early years, proposed by the *Los Angeles Times* as the "communal glue" holding together the ethnically fragmented Los Angeles (Avila 176). Culture Clash's play *Chavez Ravine* and Ken Aven's novel *Chavez Ravine Echoes* confront this conflict of competing memories embodied within the symbol of Dodger Stadium.

While Culture Clash's play is a narrative of resistance, Aven's novel is one of victimization. Oral history, ethnography, and a comedic "film noir" approach drive Culture Clash's narrative, which pivots between the telling of the residents' resistance against the city and the historical shutout game pitched by the Dodgers' Mexican rookie Fernando Valenzuela in 1981. In contrast, *Echoes* tells the fictional story of how Dodger third baseman Joe Shapiro and Dodger marketing assistant Liz Reyes initiate the monumentalization of a Chavez Ravine home that they discover and dig up beneath one of the parking lots at Dodger Stadium. Aven's use of nostalgic and a romanticized language in *Echoes* aims at expressing the moral longing to "further the redemption" of the victimized residents of Chavez Ravine (101). Through the consideration of how each narrative reconfigures the meaning of Dodger Stadium and exploration of the social, cultural, and political messages within each narrative, this chapter demonstrates how Culture Clash's play and Aven's novel, when read together, transform Chavez Ravine/Dodger Stadium into a symbol where the victimization narrative and the resistance narrative converge.

Aven's *Echoes* is based loosely on the factual events surrounding Boston real estate developer Frank H. McCourt's purchase of the Los Angeles Dodgers in 2004. When McCourt's

proposal to buy the team from News Corp. (the conglomerate that owns Fox) for a reported 430 million dollars was approved on January 29, 2004 by Major League Baseball (MLB), many Angelinos and Dodger fans feared that the real estate giant would raze Dodger Stadium and construct a new stadium downtown (Macero and Voorhis 44). These speculations were not without good reason. In 2001, MLB rejected McCourt's bid to buy the Boston Red Sox; his proposal was to move the franchise from Fenway Park to a McCourt-owned property in south Boston (Mulligan and Vincent A1+). Alan I. Casden, a previously rejected bidder to buy the Dodgers, suggested redeveloping Chavez Ravine's land into housing and constructing a new stadium downtown. According to newspaper reports, McCourt denied intentions to move the organization into a new stadium downtown (Newhan and Reid A1+; Whicker D+). However, fears of a Dodger move ensued. One Los Angeles columnist wrote a few months before the McCourt bid was approved, "as a land developer who wanted to buy the Boston Red Sox and move them out of Fenway Park, you'd [Mccourt] seem to have no qualms about taking the Dodgers out of Dodger Stadium to a new ballpark that would squeeze more cash out of the public to pay better ballplayers" (Modesti S1). Aven's novel is sensitive to these fears of a Dodgers relocation, and his fictionalized narrative may be read as an elaborative manifesto, suggesting ways of keeping the organization and Dodger Stadium in Chavez Ravine.

By beginning the novel with the free agency and contract negotiations between Dodgers veteran third baseman Joe Shapiro and Dodgers owner, Thomas Whitecap III, Aven establishes Dodger Stadium as a source of economic profit and a place of business. Joe, thirty-three and Jewish, has spent the last eight years in a Dodger uniform. As one of the top-rated players in the National League, Joe's salary of six million a year "was almost considered minimum wage" (Aven 10). Predictably, Joe has come to see the "bowels" of Dodger Stadium as a "place where a ball player could be in the company of his peers who understood the joys and pressures of the major leagues" (1). The novel's dramatic tension revolves, partially, around the disputed five-

year, twelve-million-dollars-a-year contract Joe and his agent, Levi Cohen, have proposed. If their proposal is honored by Whitecap, the new contract would keep Joe as a Dodger for the rest of his career. For Joe, Dodger Stadium would remain a place of security and, ironically, a symbol of the “economic realities that Joe lived [, which] kept him apart from those same adoring baseball patrons” (10).

In the novel, as the reader is introduced to Liz Reyes, a twenty-four-year-old Dodgers marketing assistant, the narrator says, “Liz had come to understand that in many ways a baseball team was more a business than a sporting entity” (4). And though Liz observes that fictional Dodger owner Whitecap has made efforts, since taking ownership of the team in 2003, to reach out to the neighboring communities, she does question his motivations:

Having worked under the Whitecap administration for the past two years and having seen some of the other “community” projects that had been started by the Dodgers (including the building of baseball sandlots at twelve different sites and the adoption of four elementary schools in Los Angeles Unified School District), Liz wondered what motivated Whitecap to spend so much on these projects while at the same time he was overhauling his losing team with newer and cheaper players than the more expensive veterans that were being sent to other clubs. (4)

The idea of the Dodgers and Dodger Stadium representing “community,” seems, to Liz, at odds with Whitecap’s decision not to put his efforts towards building a quality community of Dodger ball players. Even Joe, after it was made clear that Whitecap would not honor his proposed salary increase, said, “Baseball is a business. It seems like we’re all commodities. [...] You’re right. C’mon Diamondbacks, show me the money!” (30). At this point in the novel, Joe’s and Liz’s connection to Dodger Stadium and baseball is monetary.

A chance meeting between Joe and Liz—Liz accidentally running her car into a pothole when leaving the stadium one evening—leads to Joe’s discovery of two unknown-authored letters in a cracked crevice in the parking lot:

Joe’s mind left the letters for a moment as the words “Chavez Ravine” came into his consciousness. Joe had heard the phrase before. [...] it] had a magical connotation. As if there was a mystery to the land surrounding Dodger Stadium.

The idea of a mystery intrigued Joe. [...] These two diary entries confirmed that there indeed was something out there that needed to be found. (Aven 43)

Chavez Ravine's "magical connotation," the two letters found, and Rosa's (Liz's grandmother's) confession to Liz and Joe of having lived in the Ravine as a young girl, inspires Joe to dig up a portion of parking lot thirty-nine looking for more "secrets" (51) of the lost community. His efforts ultimately yield the unearthing of "the foundation and walls of a house" left intact from the razing of the community. This house, in the novel, is fully restored and preserved as the "Chavez Ravine Community House" museum. Artifacts found at the dig site include "a broken sink," "a cracked bathtub," "one pair of shoes and a third solo shoe, some coat hangers, a few broken dishes and kitchen utensils," "an intact rosary bead and a 1950's circa baseball" (62). The dig site is represented as a domestic space with such objects as the sink, bathtub, dishes, and kitchen utensils and contrasts that of the landscape of "business" of Dodger Stadium. Interestingly, the inclusion of the baseball provides the link between Joe and the unknown author of the letters. It is the masculine image of the baseball, outweighing the domestic items, that drives the novel's primary concern with the shared, male baseball culture between Chavez Ravine and Dodger Stadium.

The two letters Joe discovers, which contain parts of journal entries, speak to this gendered space established between Dodger Stadium and Chavez Ravine in *Echoes*. The narrator in Aven's novel indicates that in the letters "some words began in lower case and others in capitals"; this observation leads Joe to deduce that the author of the letters is "a child" (19-20).

The first letter opens:

March 3rd

Today would have been a nice day to play baseball. It was sunny and there was not much wind. Mom told me to stay close to home today. Some strange men have been around yesterday. Anyway, who heard of playing baseball with only five boys. Alex, Joe, Ricardo, Manuel, and the Chacon twins have all moved away. I miss my friends. They are gone from our neighborhood. They are gone from school.

When I asked Mom why she seemed so sad, she said she wasn't. I know she was lying to me. Maybe tomorrow. (Aven 20)

While Aven does not preserve the idiosyncrasies of the writer's varied capitalization within the mock journal entry, it is clear, and suggested in the text, that the writer is a young boy. For the boy, as for Joe, baseball is a male-dominated sport, as is indicated by his rhetorical remark about whether or not it is possible to play baseball with "only five boys." The boy's journal entry appropriately contains a child's logic in understanding the absence of his friends and corresponds historically with the majority of the Ravine's residents accepting L.A. City Housing Authority's "resettlement offers" in the spring and summer of 1952.⁹ The repetition of the word "gone" in the last two simple sentences in the main paragraph of the journal entry represents the residents' relocation as a mass disappearance. By presenting the residents' relocation as a "disappearance" (20), Aven's novel provides moral justification to Joe's changing attitudes towards his desire not to play baseball anywhere other than L.A. and his strong feelings of responsibility to the surviving residents of Chavez Ravine.

The second letter, found by Joe and his work crew, Ed and Joaquin, divulges more about the boy's relationship with his home in the Ravine. Dated three weeks later, the entry reads:

March 28

I don't have many things, I love my baseball glove. I have a baseball. I have this nice paper. I like this pen. Mom got it for me when school began. Uncle Felix and Aunt Lourdes and Mom gave me this one box. I can fill it up with my things.

I said goodbye to Mrs. Wilson at school. I still do not understand why we have to move. Uncle Felix said that someday we could come back to a better house. I hope that this can happen.

My sister Alice doesn't know what is going on. I just know that I will miss my friends. But so many of them have left. Maybe we can live near them near our own house. (43)

⁹ See page 169 in Don Parson's chapter, "This Modern Marvel: Chavez Ravine and the politics of Modernism," in his book *Making a Better World: Public Housing, the Red Scare, and the Direction of Modern Los Angeles*.

The second letter is built on a variety of material objects such as the baseball glove, the pen and paper, and references to the boy's school teacher and family members, all of which attest to the Ravine's cultural value as a community. Although it is baseball that opens the doors into the private world of Chavez Ravine for the characters in *Echoes*, the idea of the Chavez Ravine neighborhoods as a close-knit community, "glued together by a common background, religion and language," contrasts with the "business" matters of Whitecap's Dodger Stadium in the novel (65).

Unlike Aven's *Echoes*, Culture Clash's play *Chavez Ravine* places the authority of this vindication directly into the voices of the Ruiz family (Maria, Henry, Mother Ruiz), an amalgamation of the twelve families that remained in the Ravine until their forced evictions in 1959. Culture Clash's play reveals a more sophisticated process, presenting the audience with a stage that is at once Dodger Stadium and at the same time the neighborhoods. Particularly helpful in understanding the resistance narrative in Clash's *Chavez Ravine* is Tara Yosso and David García's Critical Race Theory (CRT) critique of the play. Yosso and García's CRT approach emphasizes the role of "cultural resilience and resistance of People of Color" in the United States and challenges the historical and social discourse of "deficit thinking." "Within and beyond the formal school curriculum," Yosso and García write, "deficit approaches to history encourage whites to enjoy a false sense of supremacy while People of Color are stigmatized as culturally and racially inferior" (152). As critics of the play, Yosso and García assert convincingly that Culture Clash places the "experience of people of color and their cultural resilience and resistance center stage" (149). They also find that the play "reveals the community cultural wealth" of the neighborhoods and conclude that the play avoids romanticizing the plight of the residents while at the same time repossessing and preserving the residents' collective history of Chavez Ravine (168).

In Act One of the play, when houses are lowered upon the stage (set as Dodger Stadium), Culture Clash's stage becomes symbolic for a space that is both baseball stadium and neighborhood community, entertaining and politically engaging. A note from Culture Clash on staging is helpful:

Even though there were movable backdrops, a few chairs and tables, set designer Rachel Hauck, for the most part, kept the stage bare [...]. There were no realistic sets. This freed the performers to easily move from scene to scene, from decade to decade, from character to character. [...] *Chavez Ravine* is a play about an American city in constant flux: the action on stage flowed without the cumbersome trappings of a traditional play. (40)

Amongst all the movement and "flux" on stage, Culture Clash is successful in reminding its audience of the play's concern with redefining the symbolic function of Dodger Stadium. Transformed into both Dodger Stadium and the neighborhoods of Chavez Ravine, the stage becomes a fluid space from which to tell the story of the failed housing project proposed for the Ravine and (as Culture Clash sees it) the story of L.A.'s Latin American community's revitalized interest in attending Dodgers baseball games in the 1980s.

As the play negotiates the stage's space between the telling of its two stories, the ghost-like characters, and siblings, Maria and Henry Reyes enter onto the playing field and converse with Fernando Valenzuela, the twenty-year-old rookie pitcher from Mexico. Maria places a house on top of second base and then puts an umbilical cord beneath the house (Culture Clash 40). Maria's gesture of placing the umbilical cord beneath the house, and thus on top of second base, designates the intersection between the sacred and the profane: an attempt to marry the public history of Dodger Stadium with the private, "hidden" history of the neighborhoods of Chavez Ravine. Speaking directly to Fernando, she says, "these are sacred lands you're pitching on Fernando" (40). It is significant that, as residents of the Ravine, Maria and Henry initiate the healing between the Dodgers (the profane) and Chavez Ravine (the sacred). In this way, Dodger

Stadium in *Culture Clash*'s play functions as a place of entertainment and as a classroom, a point of common reference for the often-ignored history of the residents.

The "collective history," or cultural memory, of the neighborhoods in *Culture Clash*'s *Chavez Ravine* hinges on Maria's notion of the Ravine as "sacred land" and Henry's desire to embrace the "American" world on the other side of the Ravine's hills. These two representations of the Ravine are indicated in a short dialogue between Henry and Maria in the beginning of play:

Maria: It was no slum, man. It was home.
 Henry: It was hard times to be sure.
 Maria: It was Familia. (40)

The "home," in Maria's words, of the residents is introduced to the audience through re-establishing the geography of the Ravine and the use of symbols which connect the residents to a native past. *Culture Clash*'s earthy symbols, such as the "full blooded Yaqui Indian" La Sobadora (La juana de los Perros) and such traditions as placing umbilical cords underneath a house after a baby was born, correspond to Manazar's (the play's narrator) poetic description of the Ravine's original "universe" as "big rocks / clean water, / earth, / not concrete" (45). "Home," too, is not limited to the canyon walls of the Ravine. As Manazar continues his poetic rendering of life in Chavez Ravine, he remembers how residents would go "skinny diving" in the L.A. river and head to Chinatown to pick coins "out of the good luck fountains" to pay for the trolley fair over to the Coliseum (45). This example of "navigational capital"—Yosso and García's term for how the residents show "skills in maneuvering through social institutions" other than the residents' own (162)—represents the fluid movement of the residents in and out of the community. Navigational capital demonstrates to the audience that while the Ravine might have been geographically isolated from the rest of the city, the residents themselves were not.

Yosso and García's six forms of cultural capital oppose the representation of Chavez Ravine as a slum. To Maria's brother Henry, though, life in the Ravine "was hard times to be sure," and he later says to Maria, "I'm gonna give my kids more than foot prints in the dirt and

chicken shacks. It's a goddamned slum up here" (Culture Clash 46). In Yosso and García's interpretation, Henry's decision to leave the Ravine is equivalent to him giving into the "city's deficit view of the Ravine and its residents." They argue:

Henry's aspirations to progress with his family actually coincide with his mother's dreams for her family. Yet his experience as a World War II veteran shifts his view of his predominantly Mexican community. He has begun to view himself more as a Mexican American, with an emphasis on American, and even warns his sister that in fighting the city's eminent domain ordinance, she is spending too much time "hanging around those pachucos and the Reds at the Union Hall." (159)

To further support Yosso and García's claim that Henry buys into the deficit view of the Ravine, one might point out that Henry ends this same conversation with his sister by saying, "there's nothing here" (Culture Clash 46). But as important as it is to celebrate the cultural resistance of the residents, the symbolism and cultural memory reflected in Henry's character must not be overlooked. Near the end of the play, the cultural memories of a group of male residents who resist Maria's activism resemble Henry's "deficit thinking" when they tell Maria that they "all love baseball" (Culture Clash 57). It is these two conflicting attitudes, Maria's resistance and Henry's "deficit," which bring them together at the end of the play at Dodger Stadium to support Valenzuela's shutout game. It is for the love of the community and for the love of baseball that Valenzuela and the audience are educated about the story of Chavez Ravine.

Similar to the way the play *Chavez Ravine* educates its audience, Aven's *Chavez Ravine Echoes* also educates its reader about the Ravine's history. As opposed to Maria and her mother in *Chavez Ravine*, all three major Mexican American characters in *Echoes* share the cultural memory of victimization and represent those residents who gave in and sold to the city. Liz's grandmother, Rosa, has kept her sixteen years of life in the Ravine hidden from her family. Inspired to reveal her "secret" to her granddaughter because of Joe's findings in the Dodger parking lot, Grandma Rosa's recollection of her life in the Ravine revolves around three main points. First, Rosa attests to the Ravine as a community of hardworking people and a place of

culture. Second, unlike the characters in Culture Clash's play, Rosa's opinion that the residents were "tricked" into giving away their lands represents her and the other residents of the Ravine as innocent victims who were "duped." "But it was our home," she tells Joe and Liz, "Mexican-American people. Working hard. Trying our best to get by. And then it was all taken away from us" (Aven 52). And lastly, in reaction to being taken advantage of, Grandma Rosa explains her and her husband's decision to raise their children in an "American" cultural environment. Rosa says to Liz:

We saw a pattern. White people would and could take advantage of those who did not speak their own language. I mean those who really could not speak their words, who could not understand their ways, who would not embrace their culture. We decided that the English we learned in school, the customs that the teachers were modeling for us, well, we better fully embrace them. (53)

The historical and cultural memories of Aven's other Mexican American characters, Father Robert Torres, a Catholic priest who grew up in the Ravine, and Dr. Luis Rivera, a professor of Chicano Studies at California State University, fit within the above discourse of victimization.

In Aven's novel, Father Robert Torres speaks at the opening ceremony of the Chavez Ravine Community House at Dodger Stadium, which is symbolically held on Cinco de Mayo. His memories are similar to Grandmother Rosa's. Calling history the "sacred shrine in any society," Father Torres encourages his audience to see the powerful connection between history and cultural memory:

You see ladies and gentlemen, history is an all important tool. The inhabitants of Chavez Ravine have had their history buried and forgotten for fifty long years. [...] In a sense we have moved on, created families, and become outstanding American citizens. But inwardly we have hurt our souls. [...] Nevertheless the sense of loss and helplessness that accompanied our removal from this Ravine has been a constant companion in all of us. [...] For the first time in fifty years, we can gather as a community and rejoice in the land of our youth. We can remember the emotions and activities that we embraced as young people. This house is physical proof that we, Los Desterrados [The Displaced], actually lived in this place. I thank the Dodgers for allowing this to happen. In particular, I want to thank the Dodger owner for making this happen. (Aven 113)

Like Rosa, after leaving the Ravine Father Torres chose to embrace “American” life. With this choice came the “hurt” and “sense of loss and helplessness” Father Torres felt when turning his back on his Mexican culture and his home. Here, Father Torres’s feelings of loss and helplessness are associated with guilt--a guilt that is shared with the novel’s privileged characters.

In an earlier passage from *Echoes*, Rosa confesses to Liz, “And this is my sorrow. You should have learned both languages. Both customs. You should have known about your heritage. You should have known about my life in Chavez Ravine” (Aven 54). One way to explain this shared, internal guilt is that, like Culture Clash’s Henry, Aven’s Chavez Ravine residents bought into the “deficit view” of Chavez Ravine, thus becoming “outstanding American citizens.” Interestingly, like Joe and Levi, Los Desterrados of Aven’s novel carry within them the same nostalgia and guilt over the destruction of their own neighborhoods. And while the very act of Rosa’s and Father Torres’s testimony speaks to an effort by the residents to resist the continued blurring of their history, it is undermined by the novel’s underlining message that it is the Whites, the “Dodgers” and “Dodger owner,” who have the power to initiate, and take the credit for, the healing between the residents and the Dodger organization.

The two major protagonists in Aven’s novel, Joe Shapiro and Levi Cohen, develop an “innocent yearning” to “spread the message of the mistreatment that innocent Mexican-Americans had faced fifty years ago” (146). At first, Levi, Joe’s agent, does not fully support Joe’s decision to prioritize the Community House over his baseball career. Only later, after listening to his grandfather recollect about watching the Dodgers play in Brooklyn and his belief in the moral responsibility people in power have to the public, does Levi change his mind.

He thought about the moral implications of what happened [...] He saw clearly the pull the hole in the parking lot had on Joe. Now he hoped that same conviction would lead him to help further the redemption of those who had been mistreated fifty years ago. (101)

Beneath Levi's epiphany to support the Community House project in any way he can lies his newfound belief in the current Dodger ownership's "moral duty" (Aven 101) to mend the wounds caused by O'Malley's move to Los Angeles.

Joe and Liz undertake the moral duty of preserving the Chavez Ravine Community House. But Levi understands that if Dodger owner Whitecap's plan to build a new stadium downtown is successful, then their combined efforts to bring to the surface the truth of Chavez Ravine's past could be thwarted. Levi, taking on his own morally-driven project, forms a task force of key players in L.A.'s Hispanic community, urban planners, and friends in the media to stop Whitecap's plans to move the franchise out of Chavez Ravine. Levi's proposal to keep the Dodgers and Dodger Stadium in the Ravine consists of a "mixed-use" plan that calls for a new stadium to be built adjacent to the old one, a bus route and rail line to the Ravine to alleviate the site's massive parking lot system, which then could be transformed into "business and residential use" for working class residents (Aven 115, 120).

If Liz, Joe, and Levi fail to keep Dodger Stadium in Chavez Ravine, then the City of Los Angeles could reverse its decision a half a century later and turn the land back into housing. Liz voices this irony:

It's funny. Here my grandmother and the rest of the Los Desterrados would give anything to see Chavez Ravine rid itself of Dodger Stadium. And now that it might happen, I'm not sure that is what I want. So many people come through that stadium and that parking lot. We have such an opportunity to educate people and make a little bit right out of what happened there. But if they move, and rebuild even more, we will lose this moment of history perhaps, forever. (Aven 102)

If Dodger Stadium goes, fears Liz, so go the memories of Los Desterrados. Dodger Stadium and Chavez Ravine cease being separate historical memories; the story of the stadium becomes the story of Chavez Ravine's destruction and its resurrection through the Chavez Ravine Community House. The novel's narrative of victimization, and Joe as its redemptive mouthpiece, effectively exposes the guilt of powerful elites in Los Angeles's past and corrects their errors by restoring

and memorializing the fictional Community House. In giving into Liz's persuasion to preserve the Community House, Whitecap responds, "you're right, why not allow people to come here and know what happened on our field. [...] I was not personally involved with this problem. But we would look good" (Aven 76). By memorializing the house dug up beneath the stadium, Aven's fictional Dodger organization looks good in the eyes of the media and can still claim no responsibility to the past.

In turn, Joe and Levi are placed in the heroic roles of redeeming the residents from their suffering. Professor Luis Rivera, after expressing anger at the building of Dodger Stadium, tells Joe:

Excuse me but for this I am bitter. And you, Joe Shapiro, the star of the Dodgers, you are the one who has stumbled upon the truth of what happened. [...] And now, we have the physical evidence of what once was alive under the Dodgers' complex. [...] The question now is what do we do with our find? [...] Can people be allowed to see the history of the Ravine? (Aven 65)

Again *Echoes* emphasizes that it is because of socially privileged citizens such as Joe and the surfacing of "physical evidence" that the truth of the Ravine may finally be realized and experienced by the public. Though Rivera claims co-ownership in the finding of the Chavez Ravine Community House by using the possessive pronoun "our," the meaning of the word "our" is lost when Rivera takes a submissive role in asking Joe to preserve the house. Grandmother Rosa offers the same gesture when she pleads, "Joe, please, continue your work. What ever you find will be a godsend" (53). The consequence of *Echoes*'s discourse of victimization is that no power exchange, no reshaping of history as Father Torres hopes for, has really taken place. While residents, and the public, are rewarded with a museum that honors the past existence of the residents' lives in the Ravine, the residents' political power to reshape public policy still remains unequal to that of Joe, Levi and the Dodger organization.

Culture Clash's play *Chavez Ravine*, however, places the political and social responsibility in the hands of the residents who symbolically come up to the surface of Dodger

Stadium to educate Fernando Valenzuela and the fans in the stadium (the audience attending the play). Yosso and García argue that Fernando Valenzuela's appearance in the play "symbolizes the resilience of Mexican Communities in the United States"; they assert, "few Dodger fans know the history of the Mexican families whose neighborhoods once stood where Dodger Stadium stands now, so the brief link to Fernando reminds audiences of the continuity of a Mexican presence in this part of Los Angeles" (169). In contrast to this view, the continuity "of a Mexican presence" in Los Angeles may be best symbolized through the characters of the Ruiz family and the many characters representing the residents of Chavez Ravine, which, in fact, Yosso and García demonstrate effectively in their article. More appropriately, then, and since Fernando was a Mexican national who immigrated into the United States, Fernando as a symbol might serve better as a message from Culture Clash about the responsibility that the Mexican American community has of educating current and new Mexican immigrant communities in the United States about Chavez Ravine.

Dodger Stadium works metaphorically for Culture Clash's comic-driven classroom. The neighborhoods in the play's stage production become the playing field of history, with the Ravine's late poet, Manazar, as its orator. In laying out the play's rules of engagement, the character Manazar informs the audience:

Now, I am going to bring out some professional actors to help dramatize these historical events, but first I have to read you the rules, gente. [...] What I got here is rule number one, OK: the other actors will pretend not to hear me. Rule number two, only you, the audience can hear or see me, so feel free to buy me a drink after the show, aye! Rule number three, any similarity between me and the Stage Manager in *Our Town* is purely coincidental. (Culture Clash 43)

The "professional actors" enter the stage and, instead of building Dodger Stadium, where many narrative histories of the Ravine choose to begin, proceed to simulate the building of the neighborhoods in the early 1910s. One way that Culture Clash connects to and educates its

audiences is to construct a cultural and geographical “continuity” between the baseball culture of Los Angeles and the people of the Chavez Ravine neighborhoods.

American Studies scholar Eric Avila argues that while there might be some truth to the claim that baseball “helped to solidify interracial alliances in Los Angeles,” he concludes that Dodger Stadium remained emblematic of United States civic and social spaces dominated by masculinity (181-82). “Another way to look at this historical problem,” he writes, “is to suggest that the very act of building a ballpark at the city center with public and private monies reinforced the masculine underpinnings of civic culture in post war Los Angeles” (181-82). In *Echoes*, Liz’s role as woman in an organization that is known to be dominated by male power challenges this “problem” of gendered roles of the private and public spaces of Dodger Stadium/Chavez Ravine by creating and proposing a new team slogan: “Dodger Baseball: Your Team-Your Town.”

Explaining the rhetoric of her slogan, Liz says:

“Baseball” and “team” capture the athletic aspect of our organization. “Town” encompasses our myriad community based programs. The “your” places the ownership of the team to the person reading or hearing about the Dodgers. If we went with “our town-our team” it calls for co-ownership. Most people know they can not have a financial stake in a major league team. But by saying “your” we’ve eliminated any subconscious thoughts about whose team the Dodgers are. (Aven 68)

Liz’s slogan bridges the private, business-like ownership of the Dodgers with the public communities of Los Angeles. Liz herself actively participates privately and publicly as both Joe’s wife and a prominent participant in preserving the Chavez Ravine Community House. If the bond between Joe and the boy who wrote the letters is a predominantly masculine relationship, Aven’s development of Liz as an important player in the Dodgers’ marketing department outlines a feminine space within the narrative and suggests a progression towards a public, visible relationship between the neighborhoods and the stadium.

Women in the play *Chavez Ravine*, more emphatically than in *Echoes*, take the leading role as activists to save the neighborhoods from being demolished. Maria forms and leads a

Chavez Ravine homeowners coalition to protest against the city's public housing plan, and both she and her mother, Señora Ruiz, defiantly stand off with the L.A. police when they come to evict Maria and her mother from their home. Maria's and her mother's efforts to "maintain hope for their familia and for the Ravine" (Yosso and García 159) move away from traditional forms of domesticity. Perhaps it is this direction towards feminist activism which spears on Henry's attack of Maria's association with the "pachucos and Reds at the Union Hall." As independent scholar Don Parson notes, "the Communist Party had established a presence in Chavez Ravine with a well-deserved reputation for effective community organizing" (166). In the play, the partnership between the communistic/socialist presence in the Ravine and the residents is represented in Maria's relationship to Uri, the Russian shepherd. Uri hands Maria a book by Karl Marx and tells her, "I give you this book, read it and you will be ready" (Culture Clash 48). Culture Clash treats the relationship between Uri and Maria humorously, especially when Uri lends Maria a personally signed copy of a Karl Marx book, the inscription reading, "To Uri, love and kisses, Karl" (Culture Clash 48). In response to Maria's outrage at the city's right to confiscate their land through eminent domain, the following conversation between Uri and Maria takes place:

Uri: Take it from a communist, it is un-American.

Maria: I agree.

Uri: "It is better to die on your feet than to live on your knees."

Maria: Is that Russian?

Uri: No. Emiliano Zapata say this. (48)

While acknowledging the influence of Russian thinkers, Culture Clash reasserts the importance of the Mexican Revolution and its heroes, such as Zapata, in influencing community activism among Mexican Americans.

Historically, though, community activism in Chavez Ravine during the 1951 condemnation proceedings, and throughout the 1957-58 campaign to save Chavez Ravine from the building of Dodger Stadium, was associated with conservative, rather than leftist, ideals. Ronald William López II argues in his dissertation about the history of the Ravine that "the

people of Chavez Ravine [...] were challenging projects that were supported by the entire left-liberal and labor community” (94). According to López, the City Center District Improvement Association, which was organized by residents of the Ravine in the late 1940s and was a prominent voice against public housing, “stated that they would not accept help from any organization that had been publicly associated with communism, and that they were organizing according to the laws and principles of the United States” (75-6).

Along with being historically misleading, the socialist rhetoric in *Culture Clash*’s play is contradictory. On the one hand, the nature of Uri’s response to Maria’s contempt over the City’s “forced” eviction of the residents by saying, “take it from a communist, it is un-American,” points to the United States’ dynamic political history, which includes the shaping of democratic principles and ideals (e.g. civil rights) by the social struggles of minority groups and sub-classes. On the other hand, the play does not attempt to explain its own comic contradictions. For example, after suggesting that socialism influenced the residents’ resistance against their community’s condemnation, *Culture Clash* depicts a scene set at a community fundraiser in which a large portion of the residents agree to sell their properties to the City Housing Authority in the spirit of socialism and communism.

Don Magdalino: Lo que dicen estos señores, francamente yo lo veo bien. Yo soy comunista! Soy del club socialista de Morelos! [...] Todos tenemos que sacrificar algo para el bien todos. Ese es progreso, señores! [...] haganlo por sus hijos, por su futuro, chingado! I have the deed to my land right here and I am ready to sign, sir! Quien me sigue? Who else?

Old Man: Don Magdalino is right. We must do this for our children. And our children’s children. I’ll sign Mr. Wilkinson. (50)

Unlike Aven’s residents who were “tricked” into moving, *Culture Clash*’s residents here are not victims. By equating socialism with resistance, especially resistance associated with the Mexican Revolution, *Culture Clash* represents the residents who sold to the City as also possessing political and cultural agency.

Culture Clash's representation of the residents' complex political situation is unevenly voiced in the play. In contrast to the play's pro-socialist residents, the actual Ravine residents who spoke at the condemnation hearings on behalf of the Chavez Ravine community used pro-American, anti-socialist language. Through the use of a variety of sources, including the recorded minutes of public hearings, L.A. City Council transcripts, articles and interviews in newspapers and magazines such as *La Opinión*, *Frontier*, and *Los Angeles Times*, López highlights the residents' "belief in American political principals and ideals, and their commitment to the democratic process" (93). Manuel Cerda, a Ravine resident and a leader of the City Center District Improvement Association, at an appeal hearing in front of City Council in June of 1951 is quoted as saying, "the people of my district don't want to be renters. They want to be honest taxpayers. We don't want anybody else to have to pay our taxes. [...] We don't want to be socialized" (qtd. in López 84-85). Another common sentiment expressed by the residents at the public hearings was that by stripping them of their right to be property owners the government was "taking away [their] incentive to be good American Citizens" (82). By resisting the city's order of condemnation the residents were speaking out against public housing, which ironically put them at odds with Mexican American organizations that traditionally protected minority communities such as Chavez Ravine (78, 94). López concludes by finding that the residents' "protests did not fit neatly into a liberal-conservative dichotomy, nor was it consistent with a vision of Mexican Americans as helpless victims without a voice" (94).

Culture Clash's *Chavez Ravine* is compelling because, amid the play's narrative of resistance, it also provides a voice to those residents who viewed Dodger Stadium as "the best thing that ever happened to L.A." (57). In a scene set on the night of June 3, 1958, the historically accurate date of the city-wide vote on referendum B to ratify the Dodgers' move to Los Angeles, Maria attempts to convince some Ravine old-timers to vote against the referendum.

Maria: You guys don't want a baseball stadium up here, do ya?

[...]

Lencho: When I was a peewee at Nightingale grammar school, Pete Aruthia taught me and some of the bishop boys to play baseball real good...

Joe: We had some good athletes up here...

The guys start throwing around a ball over the fire.

[...]

Lencho: We took championships—championships Maria! With torn shoes and our fathers' gloves.

Sal: We would make the white kids cry all over their new uniforms.

The guys share in a rare warm moment.

Maria: those are wonderful memories guys, they truly are, that's why we have to fight, so our children will have memories, too. We gotta fight man! No me moveran, guys!

Lencho: You are missing the point, Maria.

Maria: What's that Lencho?

Lencho: Fight or no fight, we all love baseball. (57)

This scene effectively expresses the debate between the residents of Chavez Ravine over which memories were more important: memories of community resistance or memories of baseball.

Lencho's response to Maria that "we all love baseball" suggests that the residents' cultural memory of Chavez Ravine—at least to Culture Clash—equally honors both the memory of baseball and the memory of resistance.

On the other hand, while playing up the community's "fight" to save their homes, the play's narrative of resistance falls short in acknowledging the deeper significance of the residents' resistance: that by speaking out against public housing some of the actual residents were also resisting the help of, and disassociating themselves from, influential liberal-thinking Mexican American organizations in Los Angeles.¹⁰ At the end of the play, Maria warns pitcher

¹⁰ López notes in his conclusion that the residents "declared their outright opposition to the leftist Asociación Nacional México-Americana and opposed a program advocated by the Mexican American civic leaders of the day" (209).

Ricardo Valenzuela and the audience against romanticizing the story of the residents; she goes on to explain why the story of Chavez Ravine is important to her:

Maria: It's true we lost, but what's important is that we helped create a culture of resistance. The struggle for Chavez Ravine prepared me for civil rights, the Farm Workers Union, my labor work with Bert Corona and the Chicana Movement. Chavez Ravine was huge for me. (Culture Clash 61)

In the play, Maria's claiming of Chavez Ravine's history is justified by her fictional involvement in it. Yosso and García acknowledge the play's effort not to "aggrandize" the residents' story but also add that "the play does reclaim this collective history as part of a legacy of resistance against oppression" (168). Historically, however, Maria's claim is problematic. In suggesting that the history of Chavez Ravine was somehow connected to the Farm Workers Union and Chicano/a movement, Culture Clash lumps the residents' conservative protests within the historical dominance of progressive Chicano politics. As López notes, "the Chavez Ravine community movement was radical, but this radicalism emerged from a conservative philosophy emphasizing veterans' and homeowners rights, not from a progressive one" (209). Culture Clash reclaims Chavez Ravine for its residents and impresses upon the audience the importance of a memory of resistance. "Memory cannot be flattened," proclaims Manazar, as Maria and her mother are being evicted from their home, "memory is history singing in tune with the stars, and no sheriff's baton can reach that high" (Culture Clash 60). Though Cultural Clash emphasizes Chavez Ravine's "legacy of resistance against oppression" (Yosso and García 168), the narrative of resistance in the play minimalizes the historical and cultural memory of the actual residents the play claims to voice.

Together, Aven and Culture Clash educate their audiences of the Chavez Ravine community by fusing memories of the Ravine with Dodger Stadium's symbolic power to unite Los Angeles citizens of all backgrounds around a common love for baseball. However, the moral lessons and messages drawn from each literary work differ and project two competing, but

equally justified, representations of the Ravine's history. Aven's novel is representative of those popular narratives that understand minority populations to be voiceless and thus powerless against discrimination. As a result, in Aven's novel, socially privileged characters are cast in the role of the protagonists while the residents (as a minority) are placed in the role of the victims, the ones who need saving. While Aven's narrative relinquishes the voices of the residents via Joe's agency, *Culture Clash*'s play locates the voice and agency of resistance directly in the hands of the residents. In particular, *Culture Clash* places the voices of women, the central organizers of the community resistance within the play, in the role of the protagonist heroines. Although celebrating the liberal ideology that produced the Chicano/a Movement, *Culture Clash*'s play simplifies the Ravine's complicated story and pacifies the telling of the unique political and social plight of the actual residents.

Not to be overlooked are the surprising similarities between these two works. Both the novel and the play, for instance, represent Chavez Ravine as a communal place bound together by a harmonious intercultural unity. The presence of Liz and Rosa in the novel and Maria and Señora Ruiz in the play as protectors of Chavez Ravine's cultural wealth is significant and lends itself to a feminist critique. Perhaps the most interesting likeness is that although *Culture Clash*'s *Chavez Ravine* is predominantly a play about the resistance of "people of color," it also champions a White hero through its representation of former CHA Information Director Frank Wilkinson. That the play's resistance narrative accommodates the heroic role of Frank Wilkinson (who, in the play, functions similarly to Aven's privileged characters) suggests that the resistance narrative and narrative of victimization are not necessarily mutually exclusive, or incompatible, with each other.

AFTERWORD
 REMEMBERING CHAVEZ RAVINE AND DODGER STADIUM
 IN THE PRESENT AND FUTURE

As one of Southern California's most recognizable landmarks, Dodger Stadium became the third oldest functioning stadium in the Major Leagues (behind Chicago's Wrigley Field, built in 1914, and Boston's Fenway Park, built in 1912) with the closing of Yankee Stadium and Shea Stadium at the end of the 2008 season. But since taking ownership in 2004, Dodgers owner Frank McCourt has spent more than \$110 million in stadium renovations (about a quarter of the amount he spent in purchasing the franchise), pledging at the beginning of the 2005 season to keep the Dodgers in the Ravine for the next twenty-five years (Hopkins B1; Hernandez and Shaikin A21). At the beginning of the 2008 season, McCourt, in announcing an astounding \$500 million renovation project to be completed by 2012 (which will keep the stadium functional for the next fifty years), has silenced all doubts that he will eventually abandon Chavez Ravine for a location closer to downtown (Hernandez and Shaikin A21).

Specifically, the \$500 million renovation plan includes connecting Chavez Ravine to city transportation lines (bus, and possibly subway), adding two large parking garages, building a Dodgers history museum, constructing an environmentally friendly plaza behind center field, and freeing up an estimated fifteen acres of parking which is to be used to construct commercial property such as retail stores and restaurants (Hernandez and Shaikin A21). Interestingly, on April 25, 2008, the same day the *L.A. Times* announced McCourt's \$500 million renovation plan, author Ken Aven placed a short blog post on *AuthorsDen.com* in which he described the renovations to be made to the stadium and concluded by stating, "many of the proposed changes can be found in Ken Aven's hard hitting novel, *Chavez Ravine Echoes*." Aside from this statement being understood as a marketing ploy to get Dodger fans to read his book, Aven's

fictional suggestions to improve Dodger Stadium and McCourt's actual renovation plans are similar. Both McCourt's and Aven's proposals share such components as connecting the Ravine to bus and rail lines, building a museum, and transforming unnecessary parking lots into commercial (and perhaps residential) property.

Aven celebrates McCourt's proposal because one of its major outcomes corresponds to that of the fictional proposal expressed in his novel: the renovation plan implies that Dodger ownership is committed to staying in the Ravine. For Aven's fictional scenario, renovation of Dodger Stadium means it would remain rooted to the history of the recently restored Chavez Ravine Community House. Thus, by placing symbolic icons of both histories visibly and firmly beside each other, Aven's fiction resolves the historical problem of (in)visibility and dissolves the notion that Dodger Stadium's modern symbolism holds a hierarchal authority over any other history told about the Ravine. However, Aven provides no substantial evidence that his fictional proposal has contributed directly to McCourt's planned renovations nor that McCourt's proposal would include a visible memorial or historical site dedicated to the Chavez Ravine residents.

Unlike the motivations beneath Aven's fictional proposal in *Chavez Ravine Echoes*, as well as at the center of the other Chavez Ravine productions, there is also no indication that the underlying motivations for McCourt's \$500 million renovation plan are tied to rectifying the city's abuse and maltreatment of the Chavez Ravine community sixty years earlier.

Notwithstanding, and in the words of the Dodgers Chief Operating Officer Marty Greenspun, many of the recent renovations to Dodger Stadium, especially returning the stadium to its original color scheme during the 2005 and 2006 offseason, are a deliberate effort to go "back to the time when the stadium was built, which is mid-century modern architecture" (qtd. in Jackson S7). In other words, one might read the onslaught of McCourt's renovations as a way to reaffirm and maintain Dodger Stadium's "modern" appearance and its dominant centrality upon, and within, the lives of those who live in southern California.

This thesis reveals several important directions in which future discussions about memory and representation of Chavez Ravine's history need more exploration. First, though it was beyond the scope of this project, the volume of creative outpouring about Chavez Ravine which this study addresses begs the question: what are the current social, cultural, and political forces in Los Angeles and in the United States that helped create a fertile environment for artists to be able to challenge previously held historical representations of the Ravine? For example, none of the newspaper articles that I cite in the above discussion on McCourt's renovation plan, nor any others that I have read, make a direct connection between McCourt's proposed plans and the Chavez Ravine community. One article, however, quotes Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villarigosa as acknowledging the astonishing fact that L.A. has never connected city transportation to Chavez Ravine. Villarigosa, the first Mexican American Mayor of Los Angeles in more than a century, was born in 1953 (the year that marked the end of the Ravine's public housing project) and was raised as a child in East Los Angeles during the height of the "Battle of Chavez Ravine" (Hernandez and Shaikin A21). So it is worth noting that this same article also includes further elaboration by Villarigosa on the transportation issue. "Wouldn't it be great if we said," postulates Villarigosa rather elusively, "'This city is going to also rectify the errors of the past' and do something to change that? I like that idea. Let's get working on it" (qtd. in Hernandez and Shaikin A21). The authors of this article do not attempt to pull meaning from Villarigosa's statement. I speculate that the mayor was, in fact, referring to the history of Chavez Ravine and in particular the Ravine's residents. Thus, taking into consideration how having a mayor of Los Angeles who is sympathetic to Chicano history in L.A. impacts the success of such productions is paramount to the future study of the social and cultural impact of these recent productions of the Ravine.

Lastly, that four out of five of the artists (Normark, Mechner, Cooder, and Aven) discussed in this study are speaking from a White/dominant cultural position should not be

overlooked. This being said, the creative representations of Chavez Ravine by these artists should be examined more closely for the role a culture of Whiteness plays in minority representation in the United States. Recent scholars writing about the cultural and social history of Mexican American Los Angeles are all turning their attention to the politics of “Whiteness.” “Studying whiteness,” writes Eric Avila, “means eschewing the idea that a white race of people exist in order to understand how and why immigrants to the United States and their descendants came to know themselves as white” (xiii-xiv). If the history of Chavez Ravine is part of a Los Angeles that historian William Deverell says “matured, at least, in part, by covering up places, people, and histories that those in power found unsettling” (7), then another way to understand the significance of the recent representations of Chavez Ravine is to acknowledge that, as José Aranda points out, “‘whiteness’ also plays a social and cultural role” (10) in understanding how Mexican Americans are represented.

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APPENDIX



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LATITUDE: N 42° 01' 56"
LONGITUDE: W 87° 43' 05"

July 9, 2008

Karl Germeck (Licensee)
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0199 Old Main Hill B 103
Logan, UT 84322
PHONE: 214-454-5699
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